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THE

WORKS

OF

SAMUEL STENNETT, D. D.

LATE

PASTOR OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH

ASSEMBLING IN

LITTLE WILD STREET, LINCOLN'S INN FIELDS,

LONDON:

NOW FIRST COLLECTED INTO A BODY; WITH SOME ACCOUNT OF HIS LIFE AND WRITINGS:

BY WILLIAM JONES,

Author of the History of the Christian Church, Biblical Cyclopædia, &c. &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

CONTAINING:

I. SOME ACCOUNT OF THE AUTHOR.

II. DISCOURSES ON PERSONAL RELIGION.

LONDON:

PRINTED FOR THOMAS TEGG, 73, CHEAPSIDE.

1824.

THE LIBRARY OF

Cameron & Hume, Printers,
Berwick.

1853.

SOME ACCOUNT

OF THE

LIFE AND WRITINGS

OF

THE AUTHOR.

THE interesting and valuable Works of the late Dr. SAMUEL STENNETT, which are now first collected into a body, and presented to the Public in a uniform state, cannot fail to excite in the minds of all who peruse them, a desire to be furnished with some authentic particulars concerning the life of an individual who so highly adorned his profession; and whom God raised up and qualified, to be so eminently useful in his public and private capacity. We therefore trust the following brief account of our author will not be found wholly devoid of interest, nor prove altogether unacceptable to the Reader.

DR. SAMUEL STENNETT, the worthy subject of our memoir, was a native of Exeter, where his father, Dr. Joseph Stennett, the pastor of a Baptist church in that city, resided many years *. Endowed by na-

* Dr. Samuel Stennett, the worthy subject of our memoir, descended from pious ancestors who, for several generations, were conspicuous in the churches of their denomination as ministers of talent, learning, and piety.—His great-grandfather was Dr. Edward Stennett, a physician, who dwelt in the castle at Wallingford, in Berkshire, in the intolerant

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ture with every gift requisite to form the scholar and the gentleman, our author applied himself closely in his early years, to the study of science and the belles lettres.

BEING designed by his father for the work of the ministry, his preparatory studies were pursued under the direction of the Rev. Mr. Hubbard, an eminent theological tutor residing at Stepney; and Dr. John Walker, the celebrated Linguist of the Academy at Mile-end, which was afterwards removed to Homerton. It is natural to conclude, that with these advantages, his attainments in learning must have been very considerable: indeed his proficiency in Greek,

reign of Charles II. He regularly preached during this period in his own dwelling, and though often threatened and sometimes in great danger, the high estimation in which he was held for his professional services by the gentlemen of his neighbourhood, shielded him in a great measure from the calamities to which dissenting ministers in those days were exposed. His son, the grandfather of our author, was the Rev. Joseph Stennett, who for twenty-three years was pastor of the Baptist church which assembled at Pinner's Hall, London, where his high character for piety, talents, and learning, procured for him the affectionate regard of his brethren, the dissenting ministers of the metropolis. He is known to the religious world as author of three octavo volumes of excellent Sermons, and a fourth volume containing a version of Solomon's Song, Hymns on Baptism and the Lord's Supper, and various smaller pieces on miscellaneous subjects. Several of his hymns are contained in the collections of hymns now used for public worship. His son, our author's father, was the Rev. Dr. Joseph Stennett, who, in the early part of his ministry, was pastor of the Baptist church at Exeter, from whence he removed to London, to take the charge of the church in Little Wild Street, Lincoln's Inn Fields, over which he presided until his death, and was highly esteemed, not only by the principal dissenting ministers of his day, but also by many of the leading ministers of administration in the reign of George II.; amongst whom the celebrated Speaker of the House of Commons, Arthur Onslow, Esq., honoured him with his particular friendship.

in Latin, in the oriental tongues, and his extensive acquaintance with sacred literature, are so abundantly displayed in his valuable works, now presented to the Public, that they cannot fail to establish his reputation for learning and genius. To his eminent qualifications as a scholar, he united in a conspicuous degree the exterior accomplishments of a gentleman. The urbanity of his manners, the natural suavity of his disposition, the perpetual cheerfulness and entertainment of his conversation, added to the unvarying prudence of his deportment, caused him to be admired and beloved by all who knew him. It is not surprising, that possessing these accomplishments our author should have early enjoyed an extensive circle of acquaintance. They procured him in fact the distinguished notice and regard of many persons in high and honourable stations of life; and if ambition had been his idol, he doubtless might have been one of her successful votaries. In no other way, however, did he avail himself of this circumstance, than as it increased his sphere of usefulness in promoting the glory of God; for, notwithstanding he might readily have obtained preferment in the National Establishment, he chose rather to maintain a good conscience in the sight of God; for he was a dissenter from *principle*. It is true, he had the degree of Doctor in Divinity conferred upon him, in the year 1763, by the King's College and University of Aberdeen. This honour, however, was neither solicited on his part, nor was it accompanied by any emolument. Having devoted his life to the service of God, he sought not the honour which cometh from men, nor did the possession of it tend in any degree to lessen his exemplary humility.

We are not in possession of the circumstances attending Dr. Stennett's conversion, but it is apparent that he was called by the grace of God to a saving knowledge of the truth in early life: and it is probable that the following hymn, which he composed, contains some allusions to this event:

PRAISE FOR CONVERSION.—Psal. lxvi. 16.

1 Come, ye that fear the Lord,
And listen, while I tell
How narrowly my feet escap'd
The snares of death and hell.

2 The flatt'ring joys of sense
Assail'd my foolish heart,
While Satan, with malicious skill,
Guided the poisonous dart.

3 I fell beneath the stroke,
But fell to rise again:
My anguish rous'd me into life,
And pleasure sprung from pain.

4 Darkness and shame and grief
Oppress'd my gloomy mind;
I look'd around me for relief,
But no relief could find.

5 At length to God I cry'd;
He heard my plaintive sigh,
He heard, and instantly he sent
Salvation from on high.

6 My drooping head he rais'd,
My bleeding wounds he heal'd,
Pardon'd my sins, and with a smile,
The gracious pardon seal'd.

7 O! may I ne'er forget
The mercy of my God;
Nor ever want a tongue to spread
His loudest praise abroad.

Our author, when very young, was baptized by his father, who had previously removed from Exeter to London, where he continued to exercise the pastoral office of the Baptist church in Little Wild Street, Lincoln's Inn Fields; and of this church the subject of our memoir from that time became a member. It appears from a reference to the church-books of the society in Little Wild Street, that Dr. Joseph Stennett, the father, had two sons, viz. Joseph and Samuel, both members of the church under his pastoral care, and both of them his assistants in the work, one of them succeeding the other. Joseph Stennett, the elder brother, received a call from the church to assist his venerable father, on the 2d April 1740, which he accepted, and continued to labour in that station for about two years and a half, when he was invited by the Baptist church of Coate, in Oxfordshire, to accept the pastoral office among them, which he complied with, Sept. 1st, 1743.

It seems to have been about four years after this, that Samuel, the subject of this memoir, succeeded to the station which the removal of his brother had left vacant, as appears from the following item, in the church registry:—

"At a church-meeting held at Little Wild Street, July 30th, 1747,——

The church having had several trials of the gifts of brother Samuel Stennett, and having heard him preach this evening, it is agreed that he be called out into the public service of the ministry." And on the 24th July, 1748, it is farther recorded, that "the church having had opportunity for some time past to

partake of the gifts bestowed on brother Samuel Stennett, it was thought very advisable to call him to their service, as an assistant to the pastor—which proposition was put to the vote and carried *nem. con.*"

In the year 1758, being then thirty-one years of age, he was ordained to the pastoral office of that church, as successor to his father, having previously officiated about ten years in the capacity of his assistant.

The following Letter was written by Dr. Stennett to the church, signifying his acceptance of the pastoral office, and having never before been submitted to public view, it is here inserted.

To the Church of Christ, meeting in Little Wild Street, lately under the pastoral care of the Rev. Dr. Stennett.

My dear Friends and Brethren!

Your very affectionate letters I received, and take this the earliest opportunity that offers of acknowledging my grateful sense of your tender sympathy with me in my affliction. As I cannot but have the highest honor for the memory of my dear Father, so nothing could be more pleasing, or serve more effectually to endear you to me, than the concern you so properly express on this mournful occasion. Nor can I, my friends, better express my affection for you (which I assure you is very great) than by deploring the loss you sustain, and mingling my tears as an afflicted son with yours as a sorrowful and destitute people. It has been a trying time indeed. The providence of God has by one stroke deprived you of a most worthy and excellent Pastor, and me of a most prudent and tender Parent—a Parent whose life was peculiarly dear to me on account of his great and undeserved affection for me, and the happy advantages I reaped from his daily counsels and instructions. Not to say what I have felt for the loss of a dear and only child.—But I forbear. Your concern, as well as the sensible emotions of my own breast while I am writing to you, forbids my enlarging any farther on this melancholy subject, or making those reflexions upon it which might

otherwise be naturally expected. May the awakening dispensation be sanctified to you, to me, and to all!

AMONG the many other aggravations of my affliction, the destitute circumstances which this providence has left you in has been no inconsiderable one. For, while it has given you an opportunity to express that affection for me which I shall always with gratitude acknowledge, it has occasioned me such concern and distress of mind, as I cannot easily describe. The pastoral office I have long since trembled at the very thought of, conscious of my own inequality to it, and sensible, from the little observation I have made, of the difficulties that must needs attend it. And though I could not but wish my poor services among you might prove acceptable and useful, yet I well hoped to have been excused, at least for some years, from that necessity which providence and your earnest and unanimous solicitations have now laid me under. Duty to God therefore, and affection to you, have obliged me to take into the most serious consideration the call you have given me. And with earnest cries, and I hope a heart in some degree subjected to his will, I have sought God in this important affair: while I have with pleasure been assured that you have done so likewise. And, upon the whole, apprehending it to be my duty, I do now, though with a trembling heart, remembering the greatness of the service, and the eminent character I succeed, accept your invitation; at the same time, humbly relying on the power and grace of God for that assistance whereby I may be enabled to discharge this important trust with faithfulness and success.

MY dear friends, I take this opportunity to express the pleasure I feel in the assurances you give me of the favorable acceptance my poor labors have met with the few years I have been among you. Whatever success may have attended them, I would with you ascribe the glory to God—to that God who can render the meanest endeavors effectual to the salvation of the immortal souls of men. Nor can I forget upon this occasion, to return you my hearty and unfeigned thanks for all the regards you have hitherto shewn me, and for the very kind expressions of your readiness to make the future part of my life easy and comfortable among you.

AND NOW, brethren, I earnestly beg your most fervent prayers on my behalf; that God who is the author of every good and perfect gift, would prepare and qualify me for this arduous service I undertake—that he would grant me the presence and assistance of his Spirit in it;—and that he would crown my sincere though weak attempts with his bless-

ing and success. And it is, I assure you, and always will be, my prayer for you, that the God of peace, who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, thro' the blood of the everlasting covenant, may make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is well pleasing in his sight through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

I remain,

Dear Brethren,

Your most sincere

and affectionate friend and brother in Christ,

SAM. STENNETT.

Bartholomew Close,
May 5th, 1758.

His ordination took place on the 1st of June, and Dr. Gill, and Mr. Benjamin Wallin, preached on the occasion—one addressing the minister, the other the people; three persons were at the same time invested with the office of deacon. Of this church he was an ornament for more than fifty years, during forty-seven of which, he exercised the ministerial functions among the people committed to his charge.

For the successful discharge of the duties of the pastoral office, Dr. Stennett was eminently qualified. Such was the affability of his disposition, that he was ever ready, when occasion required it, to accommodate himself to the meanest understanding; and his unwearied zeal prompted him to neglect no opportunity of administering assistance and consolation to the poor, to the sick, and to the dying. He generously relieved their temporal wants, and implored, with fervent supplications, the Father of mercies in their behalf. As a minister of the gospel, his labours were highly beneficial to the church. He boldly maintained in his discourses the peculiar doc-

trines of Christianity, which were the life of his own soul—exhorting, comforting, warning, directing his flock—fervent and humble in his supplications to the throne of grace—administering the ordinances with striking solemnity—expounding the word of God in a pleasing and familiar manner, in the private meetings of the church—and maintaining order and unanimity in all their assemblies for deliberation. Upon all occasions when his advice or assistance was sought, he was frank, open, and accessible. He sought to restore the backslider, establish the unsettled, and reclaim the wandering of his flock. He kept back nothing from them in the way of doctrine, that was profitable: but shewed them, and taught them, publicly and from house to house, testifying repentance towards God, and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ.

In the early part of his ministry, he was the means of introducing into public life some eminent individuals whom he educated in his own house; and whose talents and learning redounded greatly to his credit, and that of the cause they espoused. The diversity of his other engagements, subsequently prevented him from continuing this occupation. He never ceased, however, to take the most lively concern in the interests of the Baptist denomination to which he belonged, and which can boast few brighter ornaments. His brethren regarded him as a person every way well qualified to heal any difference that might unhappily arise amongst them; for, to an amiable disposition, he united a sound understanding, remarkable for its correctness of judgment. It was his study and delight to promote peace and brotherly

love in the churches, and God made him eminently instrumental, in many instances, in bringing about so desirable an end. If the churches were at rest, and edified; and, walking in the fear of the Lord, and the comfort of the Holy Spirit, were multiplied, no man felt greater pleasure than he did, or manifested more heartfelt sorrow at the contrary appearances.

But our author did not confine his good offices and exertions solely to benefit the particular denomination to which he belonged. On the contrary, he laboured assiduously to promote the interests of dissenters of all classes, and availed himself of the advantages he enjoyed through an intercourse with the higher circles of life, to obtain objects of considerable importance towards the extension of religious liberty. He wisely concluded, that whilst oppressive statutes were suffered to remain as part of the law of the land, there could be no security against their proving at some future time a handle for persecution. The Doctor's judicious publications upon these subjects, cannot fail to keep alive a grateful recollection of his talents, and to endear his name to posterity.

In his private life, Dr. Stennett was a lively instance of the amiable and blessed fruits of genuine and experimental religion. He set the Lord always before him—had habitual recourse to prayer—and walked with God—was ever ready to forgive injuries, and disposed to put the best construction upon the actions of other people. He had an utter dislike to hear any one evil spoken of, and upon such occasions occurring, he would remark, "See, now, if you cannot tell something good of that person."

As a husband, a father, and the master of a family, his deportment was alike upright and exemplary. It was his felicity to be united in early life to an excellent woman, with whom he lived in close and uninterrupted affection. Mrs. Stennett was a lady of unaffected piety and good nature, and they walked together as heirs of the grace of life for upwards of forty years. The acknowledgment of God in their family, met with an ample reward. That tender love, and Christian solicitude, which they uniformly displayed for their children, of whom they had two, a son and daughter, were requited with reciprocal affection; and they had the happiness of seeing them walk in the ways of God, and their son a preacher of the gospel. Their regard to the comfort, but especially to the spiritual welfare, of the domestics of their family, was productive of the happiest effect. This was strikingly exemplified in the case of a dissolute youth, whom the Doctor took into his service at the request of an aged member of his church, the boy's aunt, and whose conversion was happily brought about by an attendance on his family worship. This man afterwards became an exemplary character, and a member of the church in Little Wild Street.

The death of Mrs. Stennett, which happened on the 16th March 1795, was an event that was shortly succeeded by his own removal. That patient submission to the divine will, which he had previously displayed during a variety of trying afflictions, did not forsake him on this most affecting occasion. The dissolution, however, of a long and endeared connection, was the removal of the link which attached him to

this life. He frequently after that event expressed his conviction that "the time of his departure was at hand." He returned indeed to the duties of his ministry with redoubled diligence, as if aware that the night was fast coming when he could no longer work; and it was with difficulty he could be restrained from such over exertion as would have proved immediately detrimental to his health. His retired hours were now chiefly devoted to meditation on the Bible, and to poetry, an art for which he had throughout life evinced a great predilection.

Dr. Stennett's residence was for several years at Muswell Hill, a pleasant, rural retreat, in the neighbourhood of Highgate, about six miles from the city, and the praises of it he has recorded in the following poem; and which we give as a specimen of his talents in that delightful art:

Tir'd of the world's incessant noise,
And sick of all its flatt'ring joys;
I hail the day, I bless the hour,
That brings me to my rural bower.
In sweet reflection here I sit,
And here enjoy the soft retreat:
Ascend the little flowery mount,
And there life's weary steps recount;
Then cast my cheerful eyes around,
O'er distant hills, and mossy ground;
O'er fields attir'd in verdant green,
Enraptur'd with the pleasing scene:
The fleecy sheep, and harmless lambs,
That sportive play about their dams;
The violets, flowers, and shrubs that rise,
And taller trees that tempt the skies:
All strive to make me happy here,
Happy, without an anxious care;

Strive to direct my thoughtful breast,
And soothe my passions into rest;
Soften'd by nature's silent voice,
And sooth'd by these her artless joys,
I feel my soul prepar'd to hear,
What Heaven may whisper in my ear.
'Twas in the evening of the day,
When the bright sun's declining ray,
Darted its light thro' Eden's trees,
Waving their tops with gentle breeze:
'Twas then the God that dwells on high,
Deign'd to descend from yonder sky,
And in a form divinely sweet,
To own and bless that fair retreat.
There He had used to walk, and there,
To entertain the happy pair,
With new discoveries of his will,
And joys that none but angels feel.
Oh! would he deign to visit me,
In mercy mixed with majesty;—
Deign when I walk in evening shade,
Beneath those bowers his hand hath made,
To whisper in my listening ear,
That well known voice I long to hear—
"Thy many sins are all forgiven,
Thy worthless name is writ in heaven;"—
The raptur'd news I'd spread around,
The woods should echo back the sound:
I'd write his name on every tree,
And tell the world his love to me.
This sweet, this fair, enchanting spot,
Should never, never, be forgot:
My friends, my neighbours, all should know
There is a paradise below.

Dr. Stennett's last two discourses were particularly striking and impressive. The first, on Christ as a High-Priest "touched with the feelings of our infirmities," was the result of his meditations during a sleepless night the week preceding its delivery; but

a night so comfortable, he confessed, as he had never before enjoyed in his life.—The perfect knowledge that the Lord Jesus had of his wants, the tender care he exercises, and the sufferings he so freely underwent, were the subject of his astonishment and profound admiration. No one who knew Dr. Stennett could suspect him to be deficient in exalted sentiments of the Redeemer; yet he declared that all he had hitherto conceived and preached concerning Jesus, appeared to him as nothing in comparison with what he then experienced: And hence he exhorted his people in the afternoon of the same day, which was the close of his ministry, "to come boldly to the throne of grace, that they might obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need."

His health began to decline a few months after the loss of Mrs. Stennett, and prevented the continuance of his ministerial labours. But his love to his flock suffered no abatement. He desired a friend to tell them "that he loved them all in the Lord, and that the truths he had preached, were his only consolation in the hour of death." The temper and comfort of his mind in his illness, were displayed in several little incidents, which cannot be otherwise than pleasing, since they prove that he continued to experience in the midst of his afflictions "that the Lord was indeed gracious." Before he was confined to his bed he prayed one evening in his family, in a manner which deeply impressed all present, "that God might give an easy passage out of life." And God granted him his request. Some vinegar and other ingredients being given to him as a gargle for his throat, he said, with great emotion, which shewed his thoughts were

directed towards Jesus, "And in his thirst they gave him vinegar to drink. Oh! when I reflect upon the sufferings of Christ, I am ready to say, what have I been thinking of all my life? They are now my only support;" and he added, respecting those tenets, which he greatly abhorred, because they tended to degrade Christ's person and atonement, "what should I do now, if I had only such opinions to support me." Taking his daughter by the hand, he said, "wherefore he is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him—he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day." To his son who came to see him, and who at that time was also very ill, he said, "My son, God hath done great things for us. He is very gracious to us, I can leave myself and my family with him." Upon another occasion, he repeated this verse of a charming hymn which he had formerly composed,

Father at thy call I come;
In thy bosom there is room
For a guilty soul to hide,
Press'd with grief on every side.

In short, all that he uttered indicated the serenity of his mind, that he was happy in God, and that the ground of his happiness was the love of God, his Saviour, in laying down his life for us. "Other foundations," as he expressed it with energy, "can no man lay, than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. His name is as ointment poured forth. Oh! he is the chief among ten thousand, and altogether lovely." He was deprived of the power of utterance a few hours before his departure; but he died in a tranquil and easy manner, gently falling asleep in Jesus, Aug. 24th, 1795, in the 68th year of his age.

He left behind him an affectionate son and daughter, viz. the Rev. Joseph Stennett and Miss Elizabeth Stennett, in both of whom he had "inexpressible satisfaction." His remains were deposited in his family vault in Bunhill Fields, in which Mrs. Stennett, his beloved wife, had been interred but a few months before him. The pall was supported by the following ministers; Dr. Kippis and Dr. Rees, of the Presbyterian, Mr. Brewer and Mr. Towle, of the Independent, Mr. Martin and Dr. Jenkins, of the Baptist connection. The funeral sermon was preached 6th Sept. 1795, by Dr. Jenkins, who had himself been a member of the church in Little Wild Street, and by them called to the ministry of the gospel, from 1 John iii. 16. and a peculiarly solemn and interesting address was delivered by Mr. Booth at the place of interment. The sermon and address were afterwards published at the request of the church, who not only engaged to defray the expenses of publication, but also took upon themselves to conduct the funeral and support the whole expense attending it.

The loss of such an eminent character as Dr. Stennett, was deeply regretted, not only by all the Baptist churches throughout the kingdom, but also by many most respectable persons of the other denominations of Protestant Dissenters, and also of the National Establishment. John's eulogy concerning one of the best men in apostolic times, was pronounced to be applicable to his memory in every circle of the godly; "Demetrius hath a good report of all men, and of the truth itself; yea, and we also bear record, and ye know that our record is true."

THE following brief sketch of the character of Dr. Stennett appeared in the Protestant Dissenters' Magazine, Vol. II. p. 367, &c. It was drawn up by his friend Dr. Winter, and comprises so handsome a tribute to his memory that it would be unjust to withhold it on the present occasion. The candid reader will readily excuse the repetition of an idea on a subject of this kind:—

"ON Tuesday, August 25th, 1795, died at his "house on Muswell Hill, in the 68th year of his age, "the Rev. Samuel Stennett, D. D. a respectable and "eminent Protestant Dissenting minister, of the "Baptist denomination. His father and his grand-"father had been deservedly celebrated in the begin-"ning and middle of the present century under the "same character. To be descended from such men, "as well as to be able in the line of his ancestry to "trace some, who for the cause of liberty and religion "had quitted their native country, and their tem-"poral possessions at the revocation of the edict of "Nantz, he accounted a far higher honour, than to be "the offspring of nobles or of monarchs. But the "excellencies of Dr. Stennett's character were not "merely relative. His was not a borrowed lustre, "reflected from the virtues of his progenitors, but a "character which, independent of all external con-"nections, of the value of which he was however "deeply sensible, beamed forth its native goodness in "the view of the world.

"HIS mind was remarkably formed for weighing "with impartiality the various questions proposed to "its attention. His enquiries were always directed

" by evidence, and limited by the nature of the sub-
" jects, on which they were engaged. Through life
" he pursued truth with avidity. And having arrived
" at what he deemed a satisfactory conviction of it,
" he was at once firm in his own opinions, and candid
" in the allowance he made for the different reason-
" ings of others. It was still more to his honour,
" that he was a most sincere and zealous friend of
" vital religion, and estimated the importance of re-
" ligious opinions, principally from their tendency to
" advance its great and eternal interests. Deeply
" had he imbibed the genuine temper of his divine
" Master. Piety and zeal, compassion and benevo-
" lence reigned in his mind, and diffused their in-
" fluence through his whole behaviour.

" In his family, authority was so tempered with
" friendship, that while its energy was increased, its
" appearance was scarcely to be discerned. The se-
" rene piety, the cheerful benevolence, the improving
" intercourse, the generous hospitality, which digni-
" fied his favourite residence at Muswell Hill, will
" dwell on the recollection of many with melancholy
" pleasure. No longer since than last March, a
" breach was made on the happiness of his domestic
" circle by the death of Mrs. Stennett, an event which
" he felt as a man of tender affections, but which he
" supported with all the dignity of a Christian.

" In his social connections, he was the wise adviser,
" the cheerful companion, the instructive and affec-
" tionate friend. To the denomination of Christians
" to which he belonged, he was properly and warmly
" attached; and its interests not in this kingdom

"only, but in different parts of the world engaged "much of his attention. But he was also alive to "the general interests of the Protestant Dissenters, "and to the cause of evangelical religion among all "parties. Well did he know how to distinguish be- "tween the narrowness of bigotry, which never looks "out of its own contracted circle, and that cool in- "difference to religious principles, which under the "specious names of candour and liberality has too "much prevailed among many modern Christians. "His connections were large and respectable, not "only among Protestant dissenters of various descrip- "tions, but with the members of the established "church. All who have been made to drink into the "spirit of Christ, he loved as brethren, however they "differed from him in opinions respecting inferior "matters, relative to doctrine, worship, or discipline.

"He received his education for the ministry under "the tuition principally of Mr. Hubbard at Stepney. "The proficiency which he made in different branch- "es of literature, in those especially, which more im- "mediately regarded the sacred profession he had in "view, was very considerable. His mind was always "bent on improvement, and not only while he was a "student at the academy, but in every succeeding "stage of life it received very considerable enlarge- "ment with every year.

"During the space of thirty-seven years he was the "affectionate and faithful pastor of the Baptist church "in Little Wild Street. In this office he was the im- "mediate successor of his father, having for some "time before been his assistant in the same congre-

" gation. To those who were thus closely associated
" with him he was particularly dear. His friends who
" had advanced into life with him felt their attach-
" ment to him increase with their experience of his
" worth. The younger members of his church, and
" the rising families of his friends, while they reve-
" renced his superior wisdom and piety, loved him as
" a most affectionate parent. In the pulpit he ap-
" peared as in his proper element. The subjects on
" which he addressed his auditory he had thoroughly
" examined on every side. The consequence was,
" his ideas were remarkably clear and distinct, and
" his arrangement calculated to assist the memory,
" and to improve the understanding. Few preachers
" knew better than Dr. Stennett how to blend argu-
" ment with pathos, how to convince the judgment,
" and to touch the finest feelings of the heart; his dis-
" courses were at once rational and affectionate—and
" what stamps on them the highest character, they
" were scriptural. Large was his acquaintance with
" revealed religion—from that hallowed source he
" had skill to derive whatever could inform, awaken,
" comfort, and invigorate. And as he never entered
" the pulpit without deeply feeling the importance of
" the work in which he was about to engage, so he
" spoke from the heart. He was evidently interested
" to a very high degree in the welfare of his hearers;
" and it was his desire, his prayer, his labour, that they
" might be saved. This inspired him with that sort
" of eloquence which insensibly wins on the mind—
" In comforting the afflicted, and encouraging the
" weak, there was a soothing tenderness, not in his
" language only, but in his delivery, which was well
" adapted to gain their attention, by convincing them

"that the preacher deeply felt for their happiness; "and though this was perhaps his particular fort, yet "at other times, when he was reasoning with the op- "poser of religion, expostulating with the careless "and indifferent, and urging the slothful to activity "and diligence, there was an animation and energy in "his attitude and his countenance which added grace "to his most forcible exhortations. His brethren in "the ministry, especially his younger brethren, who "had been accustomed to look up to him as their ad- "viser, and who were encouraged to converse with "him in all the confidence of friendship, have sus- "tained an irreparable loss. Nor did he confine "these expressions of regard to his own party. With "young ministers of other denominations he convers- "ed as freely as with those of his own. It is greatly "to his honour, that in these priestly intercourses he "constantly kept out of sight the few subjects of a re- "ligious nature on which they had formed different "opinions from him. Never did he make the small- "est effort to gain them to his own denomination. "His generous mind scorned to take such an advan- "tage of the influence which his knowledge, charac- "ter, and friendship had over them. The writer of "this article in a close acquaintance, and, if he may "presume to say so, an intimate friendship with Dr. "Stennett for more than twelve years, recollects not "an instance in which he brought forward in conver- "sation any of the few subjects on which they differ- "ed. But on a variety of other topics, amusing and "instructive, historical, political, religious, his con- "versation was a source of pleasure and profit, which "will not soon or easily be erased from the me- "mory.

"WHAT he was as an author the public have long "known. He stood forth occasionally as the friend "of liberty and good order, and happy would it have "been for the world, had a prudence similar to his "prevailed in all parties of political writers.

"ONCE he engaged in controversy on the long agi- "tated question of baptism, and certainly shewed "himself a master of the subject—Nor will the praise "of perspicuity and arrangement, solidity of reason- "ing, zeal in supporting the firm convictions of his "mind, or candour to those whose sentiments were "different from his own, be denied him by any reader, "whatever be his views of the institution on which "he wrote.

"As a practical writer, however, he was undoubt- "edly most eminent and most useful—Besides many "excellent sermons on particular occasions, his two "volumes on *Personal Religion*, his *Discourses on* "*Domestic Duties*, his *Sermons on the Parable of the* "*Sower*, and on the *Inspiration of the Scriptures*, "have not only done him great credit as an author, "but what is of infinitely greater importance, have "been of unspeakable service in the world, and espe- "cially to the rising generation.

"SOFT and tranquil was the evening of his days. "A disorder of a few weeks continuance brought him "to the house appointed for all living—Resignation, "gratitude, and hope dwelt in his heart—His family "and his church he committed to him who has said, "*Leave thy fatherless children, I will preserve them.* "His immortal interests had long been secure—

"In the cheerful expectation of immortality, and "founding that expectation on the promises of the "gospel, and the sacrifice of the Mediator, he waited "with patience the moment of his discharge—that "moment at length arrived—and his weeping family "and his afflicted friends, amidst all their painful "sensations, could not but feel the happy influence of "those rich consolations with which Christianity in "such scenes has furnished her votaries. Absent "from the body, he is present with the Lord. *Blessed "is that servant, whom his Lord when he cometh shall "find so doing.*"

It now only remains to take some notice of Dr. Stennett in the capacity of an author, and of the numerous productions of his pen with which he has enriched the church of God. But, so many were his excellencies in this respect, that it would not be easy for any biographer to do him justice. "His own works shall praise him in the gates."

If we carefully examine his style we shall find his compositions characterized by the highest qualities of good writing: insomuch that we think it would be difficult for a young minister to select a better model for imitation. He was a perfect master of the English language, and from his earliest appearance as an author, had accustomed himself to such accuracy both in preaching and writing, that he rarely allowed a careless, inelegant, or negligent expression to escape him on any occasion. His mind was enriched with a *copia verborum*, and this enabled him uniformly to clothe his ideas in the most appropriate terms. Perspicuity is a prominent feature in his style of writing;

for, not only can his meaning be understood, but it is so happily expressed upon every occasion, that it would need some pains to misunderstand him. Yet his language is as remarkable for a chastened simplicity as it is for any other property. We never find Dr. Stennett going in quest of the *sesquipedalia verba*; there is no affected strut, no deep imposing sound, no great swelling words of vanity introduced into his periods for the sake of display: his prose is the prose of Addison, and while it is level to the capacity of the unlettered reader, it is never slovenly or inelegant. It is always the best adapted to the subject of which he is treating, and we should find it difficult in any instance to remove a word and replace it with a better.

And if from a consideration of his style, we now turn our attention to the subjects on which his time and talents were employed, we shall find equal praise due to him. Of this, indeed, we cannot want higher proof than that which is supplied by these volumes. Dr. Stennett early distinguished himself as an author, by his Sermons on Personal Religion, which first made their appearance in 2 vols. octavo, about the year 1770, and have often been reprinted both in England and Scotland. The knowledge of the human heart, and of the operations of divine grace in a sinner's recovery to the divine life—his renewal after the image of God in righteousness and holiness of the truth—his sanctification—perseverance in the ways of God—his victory over the world, and final triumph over death and the grave, are all important subjects, and discussed by our author with the hand of a master in Israel.

Soon after the publication of his Sermons on Personal Religion, our author was called to engage in the unpleasant work of controversy, by vindicating his own principles as a Baptist, and the discriminating tenets of his denomination from an attack made upon them by the late Dr. Addington. In 1772, he published, in a duodecimo volume of 170 pages, "*Remarks on the Christian Minister's Reasons for administering Baptism by sprinkling or pouring of water, in a Series of Letters to a Friend;*" which was followed in about three years afterwards, by a second volume of 300 pages, entitled, "*An Answer to the Christian Minister's Reasons for baptizing Infants, in a Series of Letters to a Friend.*" As neither of these treatises form a part of the present collection, it seems unnecessary to enlarge upon them, and yet, whatever may be thought of the controversy itself, on which the disciples of Christ, it is to be feared, will continue to be divided in sentiment, it would be an act of injustice to the character of Dr. Stennett, to pass them over without a few observations. The baptismal controversy has perhaps been the means of engendering more heat, animosity, and rancour of spirit, than almost any other on which Christians have differed. It is highly to the honour of Dr. Stennett, that he could go fully into this controversy, without ever losing his temper, or descending from the dignified station of the gentleman and the Christian. On a point so honourable to him, we cannot deny ourselves the pleasure of here extracting a paragraph from the Preface to his "Remarks."

"As to the manner," says our author, "in which "this controversy has been conducted, I am afraid

" both parties have sometimes failed, in regard of that " meekness and charity which the gospel teaches, if " not that good nature and decorum which the laws of " humanity demand. Such, it has often been observ- " ed, is the unhappy fate of very many religious dis- " putes. But, wherever the fault lies, I most heartily " agree with all good men in lamenting, not excusing " it. Intemperate heat will naturally enough precipi- " tate a bigot, and such there are among all denomi- " nations of Christians, into these shameful mistakes. " But how strange is it that they who mean well, " however mistaken, should suffer themselves to be " put out of humour by the weakness of their own " arguments! A sensible observer will, in such a case, " give a shrewd guess where the truth lies, without " entering into the debate. It ill becomes me, I own, " confidently to determine on which side the weight " of this presumptive kind of evidence, in the dis- " pute about Baptism, preponderates. If, however, " the Baptists are chargeable with any degree of that " guilt, I hope it will receive no addition to it from " this attempt.

" BESIDES the many considerations which the gos- " pel suggests, to guard me against undue warmth, " there is one which ought to have a peculiar effect " on my mind, and that is the example of a much ho- " noured ancestor, who has not only done singular jus- " tice to the argument itself, but, in the management " of it, has shewn a noble superiority to the rudest " and most indecent invectives, that were perhaps " ever thrown out against any set of men professing " Christianity. I mean not by this to insinuate, that " the book to which I reply bears a resemblance to

"that. No: the ingenious author is a man of a very "different cast from Mr. Russen: his language is de- "cent, his manner pleasing, and his professions can- "did and impartial. And I should strangely forget "myself, if I did not hold his character, as a gentle- "man, a scholar, and a minister, in all due respect. "Yet, if it should be found that expressions have "dropt from Mr. Addington's pen, that may draw "upon a body of people reflections of a very ignomi- "nious kind, he will not think it strange that an apo- "logist should feel pain on their behalf. Groundless "as those reflections are, I forbear to mention them "here, as I mean to appeal to the judgment of the "reader, not to his passions. If, however, in the "course of these remarks, I should at any time have "been so unhappy as to express myself with too much "warmth, I hope it will be forgiven me, and that an "error of this sort will not be construed into a design "of fixing the imputation of a malignant intention "on the author to whom I reply."

THIS quotation may be sufficient to give the reader some idea of the temper and spirit in which our author managed this controversy, and his manner of doing it furnishes a fine example to those who at any time or on any occasion may be led into the thorny mazes of polemical contention. The courteous behaviour, the urbanity of a gentleman never forsakes him; and if a regard to truth and virtue call upon him to vindicate a divine institution from groundless presumptions and illiberal reflections, it is done in the spirit of meekness, always without loss of temper, though occasionally with an air of pleasantry excited by "false "premises or lame conclusions." It is certainly true,

that since the time that Dr. Stennett favoured the public with his volumes on Baptism, the subject has undergone a more elaborate discussion, and may by some be thought to be exhausted by Mr. Booth's "Pædobaptism Examined," and his Reply to Dr. Williams; yet, it may confidently be affirmed, that to such persons as are capable of entering into the merits of the controversy, and appreciating the excellencies of Dr. Stennett's style, his volumes can never be superseded: but will continue to be read with pleasure as long as the language in which they are written shall endure.

The Discourses on Domestic Duties, were given to the world in the year 1783, and obtained for the author a large accession of well-earned reputation from many persons in the higher ranks of life, into whose hands they found their way. It is, probably, the most finished of all Dr. Stennett's productions—and is that performance upon which, beyond any other, his friends would be disposed to risk his reputation as an author. He was now in the meridian of his days—his judgment was matured by reading and study—and he evidently brought the whole force of his mind to bear upon it. The field was not untrodden; we had many elaborate treatises on relative duties, before Dr. Stennett delivered his *Discourses on Domestic Duties*, but we know of no writer who either before or since has done such ample justice to the subject in all its bearings as our author. The Discourses, or rather subjects of discourse, are only twelve in number, but several of them are divided into two or three parts, each probably forming a distinct sermon when delivered from

the pulpit—and the whole series should be read in every Christian family once a year. They are characterized by good sense, solid instruction, maxims of prudence, and are eminently calculated to teach professors of the religion of Christ, how they ought to walk so as to please God, and adorn the doctrine of God their Saviour. In the last discourse, founded on John xiv. 2. the author considers Heaven as composing one family, and descants upon the delightful idea in the following animated strains:

"At the evening of the day—the hurrying, fatiguing, troublesome "day of human life—the good man retires to his home, his Father's "house, the mansion which Christ his elder brother has prepared for "him. There he ceases from his labours, rests in the bosom of his "God, and has no other recollection of his past pains, disappointments, "and sorrows, than contributes to increase his happiness, and heighten "his joys. There he finds himself instantly surrounded with that "blessed company we have been speaking of; all expressing by their "cheerful smiles the satisfaction they feel in his having joined them, "and all with infinite cordiality tendering him offices of love, too nu-"merous to be reckoned, too substantial and glorious to be described. "And there, which is the main thing we have in view, his intellectual "powers are employed, without embarrassment or weariness, in the "contemplation and discussion of the most pleasing, noble, and improv-"ing subjects.

"Here, would our time admit, and might imagination be allowed its "full scope, with what pleasant scenes might we feast our eyes, with "what ravishing discourse delight our ears! Methinks I see this happy "family, assembled in the fair and stately mansion their Father has "erected for their eternal abode, arrayed in the pure and splendid gar-"ments of immortality, health, peace, and joy, blooming on their coun-"tenances, their Friend and Saviour bidding them welcome to the rich-"est banquet his love could prepare, angels waiting on them, and the "Master of the house unveiling his glories to their view. Methinks I "hear their discourse. The subject is immensely grand—the glories of "the ever-blessed God displayed in his works. They have powers for "investigating the subject. Their attention is fixed with increasing de-

" light to it. Every step they advance in their enquiries about it, is " marked with precision and certainty. The heavenly vision glorious " as it is oppresses not their mental sight: the ecstatic joy it affords dis- " turbs not their perception of the object. Their ideas and reasonings " are interchanged with unimaginable swiftness and facility. And the " pleasures which flow in one perpetual stream from the inexhaustible " fountain of knowledge, are common to them all.

" The theme hath infinite varieties, each of which is a new source of " admiration, love, and delight.—Now they fix their eye on the first " great Cause of all things, whose nature the brightest intelligences " cannot comprehend, whose essence no created imagination can ex- " plore. They gaze on his glories, which surprise, but do not confound: " inspire reverence, but forbid fear.—From him they turn their atten- " tion to the works of his hands.—Now the skill of the great architect " in the house built for their residence, its furniture, and entertainment, " employs their contemplation: and then the wonderous effects of his " wisdom and power in the more remote provinces of his boundless em- " pire.—Now they dwell on the nature, capacities, and interests of the " various orders of beings that hold a different rank in the creation from " themselves; and then on their own nature, faculties, laws, and ends " of existence.—Now the scheme of Providence respecting the world " whence they came, occupies their minds; states, kingdoms, and em- " pires passing in review before their astonished eyes: and then the " long, the diversified, the entertaining detail of each other's history holds " their attention with growing delight.—Now they call over the seve- " ral events that happened to them, from the moment they came into " existence to that of their translation thither; and all the circumstances " that combined, under the controlling influence of Heaven, to bring " about their final felicity: and then they recollect with rapturous joy " the intimate connection of these events with the greatest and most " sublime of all, their redemption by the death of the Son of God. On " this transporting subject *wherein he hath abounded towards us in all* " *wisdom and prudence*, they exert the utmost powers of imagination " and reason. At every step they take new light breaks in upon their " minds, and new joys circulate around their hearts. So a pure flame " of ingenuous gratitude and love is enkindled in their bosoms, to the " Father of mercies who laid the plan in the counsels of eternity, to the " divine Jesus who carried it into execution, and to the Holy Spirit the " Comforter who displays the glories of it to their enraptured sight.— " Thus employed in contemplating the most glorious objects, discussing " the noblest truths, conversing about the most interesting events, and

" intermingling with their discourse the harmonious melody of the most " exalted devotion and praise; thus employed, I say, how pure, substan- " tial, and satisfying must their pleasures be!

" Go into a family of piety and love.—Some few such families there " are in our world.—Read the character of each member in his counte- " nance. Be a witness of the tender offices of kindness they render " each other. Join their company. Make one with them in their par- " ties of innocent amusement. Listen to their instructive, entertaining, " and endearing discourse. Hear their pleasant details of interesting " events. Enter into their more serious reasonings. And share with " them in the comforts and joys of their undissembled and fervent devo- " tion. You will say with rapture, *Verily this is the house of God, it* " *is the gate of heaven!* But the pleasures enjoyed by this little society, " though they may distantly resemble those of the blessed above, fall in- " finitely short of them.

" How commodious is the habitation in which this infinitely large " and noble society reside! No convenience is wanting to make it plea- " sant and delightful in the highest degree. There are apartments in " it for every one of the family, and Christ is gone before to make them " ready. How delicious is their food! It is the food of angels. How " highly flavoured are their joys! They drink of rivers of pleasure that " flow from the throne of God and the Lamb. How illustrious the " company! They are all wise, holy, and good; free from every possi- " ble taint of folly, imperfection, and sin. Each one enjoys health, ease, " and tranquillity; without abatement or interruption. They are upon " terms of the strictest amity and the most cordial friendship. Their " discourse is upon subjects as delightful as they are instructive; sub- " jects that afford the richest pleasure to the imagination, and diffuse a " sacred glow of divine affection through the heart. The Father of the " family is present in the midst of them, pouring upon them the noblest " profusion of beneficence and love. Their elder Brother and Friend, " *who loved not his life unto death* for their sakes, unbosoms his heart " to them. The Holy Spirit not only irradiates their understandings, " but in the character of a Comforter possesses them of the richest con- " solations. In fine, the innumerable hosts of angels who attend them, " are happy in contributing all in their power to their happiness.—What " refined, what exalted, what divine pleasures must this family enjoy!

" The great apostle of the Gentiles, in the midst of his labours here " on earth, was admitted for a few moments into their company. And

"so enraptured was he with the joys he there felt, that *whether he was* "*in the body or out of the body he could not tell: it was paradise, and* "*he heard things which it is not lawful for a man to utter.* Let us "check our imagination then in its flight. We have not senses capable "of sustaining the heavenly vision; we have not faculties at present "equal to the investigation of this sublime subject."

THE DISCOURSES ON THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER (1787), was the next in succession of our author's publications, and it is a work worthy of his pen. His first discourse, on the use and abuse of allegorical instruction, is superior to any thing on the subject with which we are acquainted in our language; nor can we doubt that it has been eminently useful in checking a species of preaching which perhaps was more prevalent in his day than it is at present, though unhappily we still have too much of it, since it is a kind of rant which all sober-minded Christians must unite in condemning;—would we could say that it had put a stop to it. "I do not mean," says our author, "to "lay figures, comparisons, and similitudes under an "interdict: they have their use if managed with dis-"cretion and moderation. But a failure here is an "occasion of many great evils. An intemperate use "of figures tends to sensualize the mind and deprave "the taste—the misapplication of them gives a false "idea of the objects they are meant to represent—"and the reasoning injudiciously from them begets a "kind of faith that is precarious and ineffectual." After giving an able illustration of each of these particulars, he very judiciously proceeds to notice the evils attending *declamatory* preaching, by which he explains himself to mean, all discourses, whether allegorical or not, that are destitute of sober reasoning, and addressed merely to the passions—"loose essays,

"or harangues on popular subjects, filled with trite "observations, and set off with witty conceits and "trifling stories, delivered in a manner more suitable "to the stage than the pulpit. Such kind of preach- "ing is by no means adapted to instruct and edify: "its tendency is extremely pernicious. It begets con- "tempt in those who are ill-affected to religion. It "excites levity in those who are indifferent about it. "It disgusts sensible and serious Christians. And if "any may be supposed to be awakened by it, such "persons are in danger of mistaking impressions that "are the effect of a mere mechanical influence upon "their passions, for the work of God upon their hearts. "And should not these evils be seriously considered, "by all who have unhappily fallen into this extrava- "gant manner of preaching? These are not trifling "matters. The glory of God, the honour of the gos- "pel, the welfare of immortal souls, and your own "reputation, both as men and ministers, are con- "cerned. But alas! little is to be expected from "these expostulations with weak and conceited peo- "ple, and less with those who are governed in the "exercise of their ministry by base and unworthy "motives."——These are the words of truth and so- berness, and they evince a mind well instructed in the things of the kingdom of heaven—a solid and pro- found judgment resulting from an enlarged acquaint- ance with men and things.

THE DISCOURSES ON THE DIVINE AUTHORITY AND VARIOUS USE OF THE HOLY SCRIPTURES (1790), were the last published of all his pulpit addresses, perhaps with the exception of one or two single sermons. The author was now advancing into the vale of life, and

consequently began to cultivate, in a more especial manner, an experimental acquaintance with the consolatory truths of revelation which it had been the leading concern of his life to explain and inculate upon others. They are distinguished by the same good sense, pious feeling, and devout reflection that appear in all his other writings, but have probably less of the imagination instamped upon them. The first six discourses are founded on the same text, 2 Tim. iii. 16. "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished to every good work." The last two are on Col. iii. 16. "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom,"——. The various uses for which the holy Scriptures were given, and to which they ought to be applied in the way of instruction, of reproof or conviction, of correction, and of consolation, are illustrated with the author's usual ability.

Upon the whole, the Publishers conceive that in collecting into a body the writings of Dr. Samuel Stennett, which is now first done, and presenting them to the Public in a form worthy of their intrinsic merit, they have been performing an acceptable service to the church of Christ. They trust that their enterprise will be duly appreciated by a liberal and enlightened Public, to whose patronage of the undertaking they look for their reward.

W. J.

London, March 1*st*, 1824.

TO THE

CHURCH OF CHRIST

MEETING

IN LITTLE WILD STREET,

LINCOLN'S INN FIELDS.

My Dear Friends,

The intimate relation which hath now for many years subsisted between you and me, will not allow me to doubt to whom the following discourses should be inscribed. And, though I mean not by this address, to make you accountable for their many defects, yet I am happy in thus venturing them into public view, through your hands, as it gives me an opportunity of expressing the sense I have of your candour and affection towards me, and the concern I feel for your best interests.

The subject, you are sensible, is infinitely momentous; though, alas! strangely misunderstood by some, despised by others, and neglected by most. I cannot doubt, therefore, but this attempt, in a dependence upon the divine blessing, to explain the nature and establish the authority of real religion, to awaken the attention and conciliate the regards of men to it, and to assist the Christian in the experience and practice of it, will meet with a favourable reception, my Friends, from you.

For the connection of the discourses, I refer you to the contents, or rather to the close of the last sermon of the volume, where you will find a brief recapitulation of the whole.

I have only to add, that as I trust you have already received some benefit from the delivery of these sermons in public, (a reflection which gives me no small pleasure,) so I am not without hopes, that they may afford you some farther profit and entertainment in your families and closets. To which ends I assure myself of the cheerful concurrence of your fervent prayers to God, with those of

Your most affectionate Friend,

and Servant,

in the Gospel of Christ,

SAMUEL STENNETT.

Hatton-Garden,
Oct. 30th, 1769.

CONTENTS OF VOL. I.

DISCOURSE I.

The Nature of Religion.——*In Three Parts.*

1 Cor. iv. 20.——*The kingdom of God is not in word but in power,* Page 1

DISCOURSE II.

The Reality of Religion.——*In Three Parts.*

2 Tim. iii. 5.——*Denying the power,*—— 22

DISCOURSE III.

The Sameness of Religion,——*In Three Parts.*

1 Cor. xii. 13.——*And have been all made to drink into one spirit,* 42

DISCOURSE IV.

The Importance of Religion.——*In Three Parts.*

Luke x. 42.——*One thing is needful,*—— 63

DISCOURSE V.

The Difficulties attending Religion.——*In Three Parts.*

Matt. xvi. 24.—*Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me,* 84

DISCOURSE VI.

The Difficulties of Religion surmounted.——*In Three Parts.*

Matt. xi. 30.—*For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light,* 115

DISCOURSE VII.

The Pleasantness of Religion.——*In Three Parts.*

Prov. iii. 17.—*Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace,* 142

DISCOURSE VIII.

The Fruits of Religion.——*In Three Parts.*

Rom. vi. 22.——*Ye have your fruit unto holiness,*—— 167

DISCOURSE IX.

The Divine Origin of Religion.——*In Two Parts.*

James iii. 17.——*The wisdom that is from above,*—— 217

DISCOURSE X.

Christ the Grand Medium of Religion.——*In Three Parts.*

EPH. II. 10.——*Created in Christ Jesus,*—— Page 237

DISCOURSE XI.

The Means of Improvement in Religion,——*In Two Parts.*

2 PET. III. 18.—*But grow in grace,*—— 262

DISCOURSE XII.

Improvement in Religion, the Fruit of a Divine Influence.——*In Two Parts.*

HOS. XIV. 5.—*I will be as the dew unto Israel,*—— 284

DISCOURSE XIII.

The Use of Religion in a Time of Affliction.——*In Three Parts.*

PSAL. XLVI. 10.—*Be still, and know that I am God,*—— 304

DISCOURSE XIV.

Perseverance in Religion the Christian's Duty.——*In Two Parts.*

JUDGES VIII. 4.——*Faint, yet pursuing,*—— 339

DISCOURSE XV.

Religion an Abiding Principle.——*In Two Parts.*

PHIL. I. 6.—*Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you, will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ,* 364

DISCOURSE XVI.

The Use of Religion in Death.——*In Two Parts.*

PSAL. XXIII. 4.—*Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me, thy rod and thy staff they comfort me,* 392

DISCOURSE XVII.

The Final Consummation of Religion in Heaven.——*In Three Parts.*

ROM. VI. 22.——*The end everlasting life,* 415

DISCOURSE I.

THE NATURE OF RELIGION.

1 Cor. iv. 20.——*The kingdom of God is not in word, but in power.*

Wherein religion consists, is an enquiry which hath justly challenged the attention of mankind, in every age, and in every part of the world. But so various are the opinions which have obtained upon this important subject, that he who hath not entered into the spirit of the thing itself, would be almost tempted to judge it impossible to ascertain the true nature of it, with any degree of clearness and precision. And yet, admitting that there is such a thing as religion, nothing is more evident than that it must be capable of a full and clear description. And whatever difficulties may be supposed to attend the explanation of this point, yet if men would but soberly listen to the dictates of reason, together with the concurrent testimony of scripture and experience, they would not find it so hard a task as they imagine, to acquire at least some general notions about it. What I propose therefore in this discourse is, to give you a brief description of what I apprehend to be the true nature of religion. And whether we are, or are not ourselves interested in this divine blessing; yet, I persuade myself, this account of it will so far approve itself to the judgment and consciences of men, as to oblige them to acknowledge, that it is an object most deserving of their attention. This description then I shall ground on the passage now before us, which at once partakes of all the beauty and variety of a most expressive figure, and of all the strength and perspicuity of the plainest language. *The kingdom of God is not in word, but in power.*

The apostle, you will find by looking back a few verses before the text, had proposed himself to the Corinthians as their example, offering it both as an excuse for this freedom, and as

an argument to conciliate their regards, that he was their father, *having in Christ Jesus begotten them through the gospel.* And lest, in his absence, the lively impression which his doctrine and manner of life had made upon their hearts, should in any degree be erased, he tells them, he had sent Timothy to remind them of his ways in Christ. But they were not from hence to conclude, as some of their false teachers had insinuated, that he did not design himself to come among them. For, says he in the verse preceding the text, *I will come unto you shortly, if the Lord will.* And he adds, *I will know, not the speech of them which are puffed up, but the power.* "I will judge of the pretensions of these new apostles, not by their *words*, their confident talk, or their insinuating manner of address; but by *the power*, the miraculous proofs they have to bring in vindication of their mission. *For the kingdom of God is not in word, but in power.* The Christian dispensation owes its existence and support, not to human wit and eloquence, but to the exertion of divine power and grace."

But as the spirit and tendency of any one's doctrine, as well as the miraculous powers he may claim, is a very just and natural criterion, by which to judge of the pretensions of him who publishes it; so I see no reason why this may not be included in the passage before us. And then the text, without offering any violence to it, may be understood, not only as expressive of the extraordinary means by which the Christian dispensation was first introduced and established, but as descriptive of the nature and tendency of the Christian doctrine itself. The gospel, if received in truth and love, produces effects which are substantial and important. A new *kingdom* is set up in the heart of the real Christian. And that kingdom is not in *word*, it consists not in mere notions, forms, or appearances, but in *power*, in the commanding influence of the great principles of religion on our tempers and lives. Our Saviour to this purpose admonishes us, to *seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness a.* And the apostle himself elsewhere affirms, that *the kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost b.*

a Matt. vi. 33. *b* Rom. xiv. 17.

Now, before I proceed to consider this figurative description of religion, it will be necessary to give you some general explanation of the term itself. And you hardly need be told, it is variously used, though it always conveys an idea of those concerns which more immediately relate to God and the soul.

It is often you know put *objectively* for the principles we profess, or for that particular form of worship to which we are attached: so we frequently speak of the Christian and the Pagan, the Popish and the Reformed religion. But in these discourses I shall consider it *subjectively*, and that chiefly in respect to the heart of man, which is its proper residence, and from whence proceed the natural and genuine effects of it in the life. Now in this view of it, it comprehends all those exercises of the mind, by which we are first led into an acquaintance with God, and are afterwards gradually formed for the enjoyment of the heavenly blessedness. In short, it is no other than the regards due from the creature to him who made him, and which must have their origin in the heart, that being the noblest part, and the spring of all human actions. And if it be farther enquired, what these regards are, it is easy to see that they must be determined by the spiritual and perfect nature of that Being, who is the great object of religion; and by the particular capacities and circumstances of those, who are the subjects of it. God is a spirit, possessed of every possible perfection, and the constant source of all the good which creatures enjoy. Religion, therefore, must be a spiritual thing, consisting in the contemplation of God, a due reverence for him, an entire confidence in him, a supreme love of him, and a cordial subjection of mind to his whole will. This must be the nature of it, with regard to all intelligent creatures, whatever be the rank they hold in the scale of beings, and whatever the capacities they are endowed with. This is the religion both of angels and of men. But then it is evident, since man is in a fallen state, that his religion must differ, and that in some very important points of it, from the religion of pure and innocent creatures. He must be recovered, at least in some degree, from the blindness, stupidity and misery in which sin hath plunged him, before he can exercise those spiritual affections towards God, which were just mentioned. His heart

must be formed into a subjection to that wise and gracious scheme, which Heaven hath appointed for the redemption and salvation of sinners; which subjection will express itself by an ingenuous sorrow for sin, and a humble confidence in the divine mercy. And since it is by degrees the good man grows up from his first implantation in the church of Christ, to the likeness of the blessed God, he must to this end, pass through various exercises of mind, to all which, both the dispensations of providence, and the means of grace, do, under a divine influence, very happily and largely contribute; till at length religion, thus begun on earth, is consummated in eternal glory above.

From this general view then of religion, let us now proceed to a more particular consideration of the animated description given us of it in the text.

I. It is *the Kingdom of God;* a kingdom which he hath erected in the hearts of men. And,

II. It consists *not in Word, but in Power.* It is not a mere imagination or empty sound, but a substantial and important reality.

I. It is *the Kingdom of God;* a state, polity, or dominion, which he hath set up in the soul of man. So that I am here naturally led to speak of the Sovereign of this kingdom, the subjects of it, the statutes and laws by which it is governed, the strength, order and beauty of it, the privileges and immunities with which it is endowed, and, in one word, its stability and duration.

1. Of this kingdom God is the *Sovereign.* He hath laid the foundations of it, and he therefore of right presides over it, commanding a ready obedience to his will, taking effectual care of its real interests, and administering all its affairs with infinite wisdom and goodness. To him religion, in all the various and different expressions of it, pays its humble and dutiful homage. By him only its sacred dictates are to be guided, and to him alone it is accountable for all matters both of faith and practice. Nor is there any one holy and devout affection of the mind, but rises into existence, and grows and increases there, through that authority which he holds over the human heart. An authority the more pleasing to a good man, as he sees it exercised by the just and mild administration of

the Lord Jesus Christ. For God hath not only set him king over his holy hill of Sion, his church in general, but hath appointed him the throne in the heart of every believer in particular. And then,

2. As the heart is the place where he hath erected his throne, so the powers of it, the understanding, will and affections, are the proper *subjects* over which he sways his sceptre. These, while men remain strangers to religion, are in a state of anarchy and confusion, like a people who have no head to govern them, and are torn to pieces with civil discords and contentions among themselves. They are alienated from God, their only lawful sovereign, and at continual war with one another. But, when the empire of religion is restored to the soul, all the various powers and passions of it flock in to the standard which is set up there, and joyfully submit to its authority. The understanding, before overpowered with ignorance, doubt and scepticism, is captivated to the obedience of faith. The conscience, once blind and stupid, is struck with the excellence and importance of divine things. The will, ere this fully bent on vanity and sin, is strongly inclined to holiness and goodness. And the affections, which were wretchedly bewildered in a fruitless pursuit of happiness among the creatures of sense, are now united under the banner of enlightened reason, and directed to God as their chief good. Nor need we,

3. Be at any loss to determine, what are the *means* or *instruments*, by which the soul of man, thus restored to the dominion of its rightful Sovereign, is ruled and governed. Whilst it remained in its former state, it had no other law to which it chose to submit, but its own depraved inclinations. Reason and conscience might indeed sometimes interpose their authority; but alas! their dictates, like the remonstrances of good old Eli to his children,—*My sons, why do ye such things a?* were weak and feeble, and scarce ever heard and obeyed. But now, these ancient vicegerents of Heaven resume their original power, and at once assisted by the superior light of divine revelation, and invested with the mighty energy of divine grace, command obedience to their precepts. By the sacred scriptures the man of religion would have his opinions, affections and con-

a 1 Sam. ii. 23, 24.

duct, directed, governed and tried. To this the statute law of God, he brings his heart and his life, daily comparing himself with it, and judging himself by it. For these the venerable records of heaven, fully satisfied of their authority, he maintains a sacred reverence: and from a genuine principle of true loyalty to his sovereign, he labours to conform to them, not wishing to be released from their commanding influence. And to this cheerful obedience, though alas! disgraced with many weaknesses and imperfections, he is sweetly allured, and powerfully urged by the generous motives the blessed gospel suggests; motives arising from the unparalleled love of the Son of God himself, in laying down his life, to restore the honours of his broken law, and to vindicate the rights of his injured government. From hence likewise,

4. We are led to contemplate the *beauty*, *order* and *harmony* of this spiritual kingdom, which is another idea the metaphor naturally conveys. Sin, as hath been already observed, introduces into the soul of man the most horrid anarchy and confusion. It raises a civil war there, and sets all the powers of the heart at variance, not with God only, but with one another. And, in these sad circumstances, what a miserable appearance does the mind of man make! How is its beauty defaced; its strength enervated; and its real happiness spoiled and destroyed! But, when God sets up his kingdom there, when real religion takes possession of the heart, the face of things is in some good degree altered. This little state, torn to pieces by intestine broils, angry passions, and furious lusts, emerges out of that disgrace and misery, in which it was involved, collects somewhat of its former strength, and rises gradually into a fair and flourishing empire: as the soul itself becomes again subject to the dominion of heaven, so the several powers of it, no longer restlessly invading each other's province, retire to their proper stations. Reason guides the judgment, the judgment rules the will, the will commands the affections, and the affections of the mind, under the united conduct of the judgment and the will, restrain and regulate the inferior appetites of nature. And thus order succeeds confusion, and with it that beauty, firmness and union, which were originally the glory of the human soul.

But, by all this I do not mean to insinuate, that religion at once exalts a man to a state of perfection. No; the kingdom of God is as yet in its infancy, and of consequence we see it struggling, even in the best of men, with many difficulties and dangers. There are still Canaanites in the land, remains of ignorance, passion, and sin, which will prove the unhappy occasions of disquietude and contention, if not in some instances of a kind of mutiny and rebellion. Nevertheless it must be acknowledged, that in proportion to the influence of religion on the heart, so is the beauty, health, and vigour of the mind. These are the natural and genuine fruits of a true knowledge of Christ and his grace, and of a lively experience of real and substantial piety. Hereby the man is invigorated and strengthened, united to God and himself, and possessed of a dignity which will command reverence from even wicked men themselves. And if such be the nature and tendency of religion, how great may we reasonably suppose,

5. Are the *privileges* and *immunities* annexed to this spiritual kingdom! God himself, as you have seen, is both the Founder and the Sovereign of it; and since it receives its denomination and existence from him, there can be no just doubt but he will honour it with his peculiar favour, presence and protection. If it be a happiness, as to our outward concerns, to live under the wise, just, and mild administration of a worldly prince; to have our liberties and properties preserved entire; to be sure of the speedy and effectual redress of our grievances; and, together with peace and plenty, to possess a rich supply of every needful and desirable good; how great must be the felicity of the Christian, who is entitled to these spiritual blessings in a much higher and nobler perfection! God his king reigns in truth and righteousness, in gentleness and love: and as the humble heart is the willing subject of his government, so he deigns to make it the seat of his residence. There, where he hath set up the trophies of his victorious power, he condescends to display the charms of his beauty and grace. *I will dwell in them*, says he, *and I will walk in them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people* a. They are the men whom he delights to honour. To him they are allowed an

a 2 Cor. vi. 16.

every occasion to have access with boldness: and whilst he graciously smiles upon them, he assures them, with a generosity peculiar to himself, that he will supply all their wants according to his riches in glory by Jesus Christ. His perfections are each of them interested in their behalf; his providence and grace are constantly employed to promote their real welfare; and no good thing, which either his wisdom judges fit for them, or his bounty inclines him to bestow on them, will he ever withhold. To all which I have only to add one circumstance more, to complete our idea of this spiritual kingdom; and that is,

6. And lastly, Its *stability* and *duration*. It is a kingdom that shall not be moved. The foundation of it is laid in the purpose and grace of him who wants neither means nor inclination to support and defend it. Having raised up to himself this new empire out of the ruins of human apostacy, whilst he hath taken the administration of its affairs into his own hands, he hath condescended solemnly to swear, and that by two immutable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, that the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. Thus dignified then above the favourites of the most powerful monarch on earth, it is the peculiar felicity of the good man that he holds his liberties and possessions, not on the precarious tenure of all human things, but on the faithfulness of a God, who hath *made with him an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure* a.

PART II.

FROM this figurative description of religion, we now come to consider what is more particularly and plainly affirmed concerning it in the text:

II. It *is not in word, but in power*. It is not *in word*; it does not consist in notions, professions, or external forms, things wherein men are too apt to place the essence of it: but *in power*; it is an inward, spiritual, vital principle, which takes hold of the heart, and diffuses its influence through the life. So the text is expounded by a similar passage: *the kingdom of God is not meat and drink*, it does not consist in outward observances; *but it is righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost* b. These are the very essence of it, and constitute its

a 2 Sam. xxiii. 5. b Rom. xiv. 17.

true and proper nature. To the like purpose the same inspired writer thus expresses himself in another place: *He is not a Jew who is one outwardly, neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: but he is a Jew who is one inwardly, and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter, whose praise is not of men, but of God* a.

Here therefore, agreeably to the order observed in the text, it will be natural to inquire more particularly,

First, What religion *is not*; and,

Secondly, What it really *is*, or wherein the true nature of it does consist.

First, As to the negative part of the question, *What religion is not*; it is lamentable to reflect how much the degeneracy of mankind hath contributed to our enlargement on this head. One would, indeed, at first view, be ready to imagine, that a general contemplation of the spiritual nature of God, and of the proper use of their own intellectual powers, should be sufficient to secure men's understandings, however depraved their dispositions might be, from any very great absurdities here. But alas! what absurdities can imagination devise, which have not assumed the venerable name of religion, and under that denomination claimed the serious attention of mankind? To enter particularly into them, would be almost an endless task. We must not, however, wholly pass them over in silence. But, in the mean while, it will be of considerable use to help us through this maze, if we take the pains to look for a moment into those principles of the human heart, which have the main influence, though perhaps without being observed, in forming the various religious sentiments which commonly obtain.

Mankind are in an apostate state; and there are few so stupid, as not to be sensible that something is necessary to recommend them to the Deity. Now, *Pride* and *Self-indulgence* being the two prevailing corruptions of the heart, that scheme of religion will be most acceptable to the generality, which, while it flatters the one, can be made tolerably well to consist with the other. And since the judgment is often considerably influenced by the will, it is not to be wondered that men by degrees come to think those opinions true, which exactly corre-

a Rom. ii. 28, 29.

spond with the very spirit of their depraved nature, though they are found, when stript of this recommendation, to be most absurd and ridiculous. The common herd of mankind will greedily swallow down a religion which is made thus palatable to their taste, without troubling themselves to consider one moment about it, whether it be *a reasonable service.* And as to those who cannot so easily submit their understandings to a glaring imposition; being nevertheless as strongly impelled by the same corrupt passions, they will have recourse to innumerable refinements, to gild over their fond conceits with the pleasing appearance of truth. Upon these principles then, we are enabled to account for that almost infinite variety of mistaken notions, which prevail in the world. To *Pride* and *Sloth*, thus either triumphing over the understanding, or else insensibly blinding it, they owe their entire origin and support; and these depraved tempers are the grand characteristics of them all. Now, by the help of this clue, we shall soon find our way through that labyrinth of error and deception which is before us, and discover what the apostle means by that religion, which he emphatically describes as consisting in *Word* only.

Under this denomination then is to be reduced, in the first place, the religion of the *Pagan* world, which consisted in the observance of certain rites, instituted by their priests and lawgivers, with little or no foundation in reason or common sense. Their beasts we see them leading with great solemnity to their temples, and there, amidst a crowd of unmeaning ceremonies, offering them on their altars, to appease the wrath of the Deity, and entitle themselves to his favour. Some we see sacrificing this animal, and others that; some bowing to a calf, and others, more devout than the rest, not sparing their very children from the flames. History will acquaint us with the different forms which obtained among them: but though they were so various, and passed under so many changes, yet they were all expressive of the same temper, and were all adapted to the same ends. To merit the divine regards, was the grand point they aimed at; so gratifying their *Pride*, while, by a kind of commutation for their vices, they enabled themselves to sin with the *less uneasiness and remorse.*

As to the *Jews*, in the next place, it is acknowledged that the external part of their religion, like that of the Pagans, was very showy and expensive; though with this material difference, that it was the appointment of Heaven, and founded in the truest reason, since the whole of it was figurative of the sublimest truths, and prophetical of the most interesting events. But mistaking the shadow for the substance, they unhappily laid an undue stress upon these outward observances, making real religion consist in an exact conformity to them, even while they were expressly cautioned against such an abuse of it. So that they fell into the like absurd manner of reasoning with the Heathens, just mentioned, having only this advantage above them, that while they gratified the same passions of *Pride* and *Self-indulgence* as their neighbours did, they could plead the divine authority for those religious forms, behind which they all the while sheltered themselves. They boasted of the kingdom of God, as consisting *in meats and drinks*, not at all perceiving the spiritual intent of these positive institutions, and wholly neglecting *the weightier matters of the law*, such as *judgment, mercy and faith a.*

The *Papists*, again, a set of people which have risen up in the room of Pagans and Jews, have proceeded uniformly on the same principles with these their predecessors. The divine authority of the scriptures they have pressed into the service of depraved reason; and have given full scope to the favourite passions of human nature, by moulding Christianity into an entire consistency with them. Assuming to themselves the sole right of explaining the sacred records, they have insolently dictated to men the terms on which they are to be accepted of God. And these they have taken care to settle in such a manner, as effectually to flatter the *pride* and indulge the *sloth* of carnal minds, and at the same time secure to their church every kind of temporal emolument, which their unbounded avarice could wish to obtain. To these ends they have established the doctrine of merit in the strongest terms. And not content with maintaining that good works are meritorious, they have, in effect, taught men thus to conceive of their bad works likewise. And so by an art peculiar to themselves, they have turned vice into vir-

a Matt. xxiii. 23.

tue, and made men gainers by sinning. Such is the very genius of their religion; and how it hath operated to produce the most fatal effects to society in general, and to individuals in particular, the history of many ages hath fully and largely shewn.

But, from them let us now turn our eyes to *Protestants*, and those especially of our own country, who enjoy the free use of their Bibles, and have been instructed into better principles. Here then we may reasonably expect juster notions of things. And true it is, we do speak with abhorrence of those fetters of ignorance and superstition, with which Paganism and Popery have bound the consciences of men. We do stand astonished at the follies and absurdities which have so generally prevailed, and can hardly forbear mingling contempt with all the pity we feel for the wretched multitude, who are stupid enough to suspend their immortal interests on forms and pretences of so absurd and ridiculous a nature. But, alas! were the hearts of the generality among us to be searched to the bottom, I fear we should find their real practical notions of religion to be as inconsistent with the dictates of right reason and the word of God, as any of those notions we have been describing. For what, on the one hand, is their religion better than *word* only, who confine their idea of it to a *servile* and *superficial* observance of the common rules of *morality*, without any regard to those divine and evangelical principles which can alone soften the heart, and mould it into a cheerful subjection to the will of God? And, on the other hand, what fitter term than this can be used to denominate the pretended religion of such, who, while they confidently boast of their *clear views* of the gospel, and their *deep understanding* in the sublime mysteries of it, neither *feel the efficacy* of it on their *hearts* to renew their perverse and wanton tempers, nor shew forth any of the admirable *fruits* of it in their *lives*?

1. As to the former. The duties of *morality*, it is acknowledged, are substantial and important realities. The interests of society depend upon a due attention to them, and they cannot with too much earnestness be pressed upon mankind. But if the essence of religion be placed in the bare performance of these duties, without any regard to the principles whence they flow, which it is to be feared is the sad case with many; it will be no difficult matter to prove, that what thus assumes the vener-

able name of religion, is, in this point of view, not only a *vain and empty thing*, but little better than a *gross impiety*. All actions must proceed from some principles, whether we do, or do not ourselves regard them. These principles are known to God, and from thence the conduct of men will take its denomination as either good or bad. Now, what in the divine account is that sobriety, honesty, good nature, or even devotion itself, which arises not from a just sense of the real intrinsic excellence of true holiness, or from any generous sentiment of gratitude and love, but merely from a servile fear of incurring the wrath of God, or, which is worse, from a base expectation of meriting the rewards of heaven thereby? Surely such a religion, to say the best of it, is but an empty sound. There is nothing substantial or animating in it; nor are there any considerations to hold men to the performance of the several duties of it, but such as are of the most precarious and uncertain influence.

But this is not all: it is as *impious*, we may add, as it is vain. For what are men doing, all the while they are thus exalting morality into the seat of religion? They are treating God as they would a fellow-creature, who can look no farther than to outward appearances; and under the notion of rendering a dutiful obedience to his commands, they are gratifying, in a very high degree, both their *pride* and their *sloth*. The one they *flatter*, by offering incense to this wretched obedience, of which they so much boast as their Saviour, to the entire neglect, if not contempt, of Christ and his grace. And the other they *soothe*, by placing a few external actions in the room of the more difficult and important duties of restraining and subduing the corrupt affections of the heart. Nay, we may carry the matter still farther, and affirm, that even *his* notions of religion are mistaken, who while he rightly considers the government of the passions as the grand object of it, nevertheless sets about this work on false principles, vainly presuming that he can of himself make a sacrifice of his depraved affections to God, and insolently expecting that, when he hath so done, he shall have a just claim upon him for his favour. Such a temper stands directly opposed to the genuine spirit of evangelical piety; and a little reflection would convince men, that while it pretends to religion, it absolutely defeats its own pre-

tences. For in this case, here is a slender restraint laid on one passion, merely with a view to gratify another. That, therefore, can never be real religion, which hath only the external duties of morality, or even of devotion, for its object; nor that either, which, though it may extend in some sort to the affections of the mind, yet hath no other principle to put vigour and efficacy into it, except the dread of incurring the wrath of God, or the vanity of meriting his favour. But while we are thus attempting to rescue the injured rights of religion out of their hands who would reduce it to the standard of mere morality, how are we instantly seconded, or rather prevented in the attempt, by the furious and licentious zeal of those,

2. Who run their notions into the quite opposite extreme! "True," says a man of this character, enjoying an entire satisfaction in his own superior discernment, "a legal spirit is a diabolical spirit. Far be the very shadow of it from me! No —religion consists in none of these things. It is such a clear apprehension, and such an unshaken belief of the sublime truths of the gospel, as at once sets the mind free from all the shackles of slavish doubts and fears, raises it above the drudgery of duties, puts an end to the fruitless labour of keeping the heart; and, while it takes the attention wholly off from itself, so fixes it upon Christ, as to relieve it of all dull anxiety about inward holiness and personal obedience." And thus, having discovered the grand secret how to compose his conscience, amidst the violent fever of inward lusts, if not the open indulgence of vice, he looks down with a contemptuous sneer on those who are lamenting the remainders of indwelling sin, and humbly aiming at a conformity to the divine likeness, as a company of weak and deluded persons, if not artful and designing hypocrites.

But if this be religion, it may be truly said of it, that it is in *word* only. It is, literally speaking, a vain and empty sound; of no other use than to puff up the heart with pride, and to lay the conscience gently asleep in sin. Nay it carries, upon the very face of it, the evident marks both of absurdity and impiety. It is indeed true, that a legal slavish temper of mind is very unsuitable to the free, generous, and animating spirit of the gospel. It disgraces that glorious scheme of salvation

which abhors the least approach to the doctrine of merit, and which so overpowers the humble Christian with the riches of divine grace, as to oblige him to treat his best attainments with the utmost contempt, in the sight of an infinitely holy God. *Christ is all, and in all a.* His *propitiation* is the only ground of a sinner's hope towards God *b*; *in* him *the beloved we are accepted c*: and by *his obedience we are made righteous d.*

But if our regards to him are to be considered in no other view, than as a means thus to relieve us of our fears, and to make us easy and secure; the grand business of religion is overlooked, yea, I may add, the main intent of it is defeated. For if there be such a thing, it stands to reason, that the principal object of it must be to recover men from their apostacy, wherein consists their misery. But what are such persons the better, yea, how much are they the worse, for a knowledge which teaches them to break the bands of duty and conscience, and for a faith which enables them, amidst all their affected expressions of humility, to riot in pride and wantonness? Nay, they are guilty, so deceitful is the human heart, of the very same thing they condemn in those of the opposite character, that is, of secretly building their hopes on themselves, instead of Christ. For while the others lay the whole stress of their everlasting interests on their external reformation, or their zealous attachment to forms, or some slight restraint of their more furious passions; these lay the same stress, though perhaps unperceived by themselves, on the clearness of their notions, and the imagined steadiness of their faith.

Thus have we seen, then, wherein consists the religion, which our text tells us is in *word* only. And however it may be differently modified, and assume various other appearances, besides those which have been mentioned; yet the leading principles of it are every where the same: and by a diligent observation of them, the imposture, though it be artfully concealed, may, I think, be easily detected.

PART III.

HAVING thus shewn *what religion is not*, it remains that we now inquire,

a Col. iii. 11. *b* Rom. iii. 25. *c* Eph. i. 6. *d* Rom. v. 19.

SECONDLY, *What it is*, or wherein it does consist. And the inference is so natural from what hath been already observed, that we need be the less particular here. It is *in power*; a term very fitly opposed to *word*, as it is expressive of all that vigour and intenseness of mind, which distinguishes the religion of the heart from the mere notions of the head, and from the unanimated obedience of the life. As the one may not improperly be compared to the lifeless corpse, which, in his discourse of the resurrection, the apostle says, is sown *in weakness*; so the other bears a resemblance, at least in some degree, to the spiritual body, which, adds he, using the same word as in the text, is raised *in power a*. There is a strength, force and vital energy in real religion, which as much exceeds any false pretence to it, as the original does the picture. The one is the life itself, the other only the faint copy.

But whilst the expression in the text naturally leads us to conceive of it in the most lively and animated point of view, it by no means countenances the wild and dangerous conceits of enthusiastic minds. Conceits, which form a species of religion somewhat different from either of those just mentioned; though with reason excused a place among them, since the madness of it would not allow us to describe it, as a deliberate sentiment of the mind. The understanding hath little to do here: for while men of this unhappy cast place the whole of their devotion in sudden impulses, ecstatic visions, and other wild reveries of a heated imagination; they do not leave themselves possessed of any certain principles, upon which they can at all be reasoned with. And yet, in order to secure some appearance of truth on the side of their delusions, they carefully select from the scriptures some such phrases as those in our text which they persuade themselves do fully authorize them. But while the Bible treats largely of the mighty power of God exerted on the hearts of them who believe, and of the influence of the blessed Spirit to enlighten, quicken, and comfort good men in the course of duty and suffering; it is sufficiently evident, that these doctrines, which the Christian with thankfulness receives, as some of the most glorious discoveries of the grace of God, are words as well of *soberness* as of truth and certainty. No

a 1 Cor. xv. 43. ἐν δυνάμει.

such power is exerted as subverts the original constitution of our natures, and having deprived men of their reason, leaves them under the wretched infatuation of a deluded fancy, and enflamed passions.

And yet, of religion it may be truly said, in respect both of its divine origin, and of its substantial nature, that it is *in power*. How it owes its rise, increase, and continuance to the mighty power of God, we may have occasion to consider more particularly hereafter; at present our concern is alone with the nature of it. It may, then, in general be described, as a *principle of divine and spiritual life*; a phrase this I the rather choose, as it seems the fittest to convey the sense of the text. It is the *vis vitæ*, the spring of life and action. Its nature, like all first principles, is simple; though it expresses itself in various ways, and can only be intelligibly explained by its operation and effects. As therefore, when we speak of a principle of honesty in any man, we mean such a sentiment of truth and uprightness, as being fixed and established in his heart, regularly influences his conduct; so of a principle of religion, it is such a perception or faith of the grand truths of it, as being deeply rooted in the mind, produces correspondent fruits in the temper and life. This surely is what is meant by the general terms of *the knowledge* and *fear of the Lord*, in the Old Testament; and by those of *faith, hope, love*, and *the grace of God*, in the New.

To learn, then, wherein religion consists, we need only contemplate the influence of this principle on the several powers of the mind, and of consequence on the external conduct. If it be considered in reference to the *understanding*, it expresses itself in our perceptions, reasonings, and reflections about spiritual objects; if in regard to the *conscience*, in a lively impression of the truth and importance of divine things; if as respecting the *judgment*, in an approbation of the things which are excellent; if the *will*, in a concurrence with whatever appears to be the pleasure of God; in fine, if it be considered in reference to the *affections*, it consists in the direction of them to their proper objects. The result of all which will be such a course of behaviour, as is in the general answerable to this state of the mind. Now, this view of religion, you easily see, affords

an almost infinite variety of matter for description: for as is the quality of those objects which present themselves to the mind, so will be the dispositions and affections of the heart towards them. By tracing, however, in a few words, the operations of the mind, in respect of the principal objects of religion, we shall collect some idea of what is the proper character of the real Christian.

1. Is the blessed *God* the object of his contemplation? Apprehending him present, he falls down before him, struck with solemn, but pleasing sentiments of his greatness and glory, and filled with a cheerful but venerable idea of his goodness and mercy. Incircled in his full orb of perfections he chooses to behold him, mingling the awful splendours of his justice and holiness, with the softer rays of his tender compassion and love. So the God appears in the face of the man Christ Jesus; and thus viewing him, the Christian fears, hopes, and loves. *O God, how excellent is thy name in all the earth! Thou hast set thy glory above the heavens a. Justice and judgment are the habitation of thy throne: mercy and truth go before thy face b.* Thee will I dread—thee will I adore—in thee will I trust. *Whom have I in heaven but thee? There is none upon earth that I desire besides thee c.*

2. Are his eyes turned inward on *himself?* The scene just beheld is now awfully reversed. Instead of greatness, purity, and perfection, he beholds frailty, guilt, and misery. Conscious he is indeed of an immortal nature, capable of the likeness and fruition of God, but is conscious that it is in fallen, ruined, and wretched circumstances. With a passionate exclamation, therefore, the natural fruit of such a conviction, he cries out, *Depart from me, O Lord, for I am a sinful man d.* But recovering himself, he adds, *Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean e.* So, oppressed with grief, he deplores his manifold sins; covered with shame, he bewails the sad degeneracy of his heart; and, for ever despairing of salvation in himself, he renounces all confidence in his own merit or strength.

3. Is the blessed *Jesus* presented to the view of his faith? His hope, desire, and gratitude kindle at the sight. With

a Psal. viii. 1. *b* Psal. lxxxix. 14. *c* Psal. lxxiii. 25.
d Luke v. 8. *e* Matt. viii. 2.

pleasure he contemplates the person, character, sacrifice and righteousness of the Son of God. Thankfully he receives this provision of the divine mercy for the most unworthy, firmly he relies on it; and thence alone derives his hope of being acquitted and accepted before God. To his instructions, as the great Prophet of the church, allured with that divine wisdom and grace which is poured into his lips, he readily listens. In his mediation as the great High-priest of the church, encouraged by his faithfulness and compassion, he humbly confides. And at the foot of his throne, as the great King of the church, struck with the majesty and mildness of his presence, he cheerfully pays his homage. So, in the language of the Bible, he looks to Christ, believes in him, and obeys him.

4. Is *sin* the object of his attention? With detestation he views the monster, in all its hideous forms, trembles while he surveys the features of shame and misery in its countenance, and fears lest he should be overcome by the subtle arts it practises. Urged, nevertheless, by the powerful motives both of interest and love, he boldly wages war with this mighty enemy in every part of his dominion, resolving, by the help of God, to maintain the struggle to the last, and expecting the victory then through the blood of the Lamb. When, O when, says he, shall this foe of God and man, this restless disturber of my peace, this cruel incendiary of all my hopes and joys, be totally vanquished and destroyed!

5. Does he turn the eye of faith on the *world?* Though, alas! his foolish passions are too often elated with its smiles, and too often depressed with its frowns; yet it is the deliberate sentiment of his judgment, that nought beneath his God can make him happy, and the firm resolution of his heart, that nought beneath him shall be the main object of his pursuit. To acquiesce cheerfully in all the pleasure of heaven, he considers as the noblest attainment of the divine life: and therefore, at the least, aims at it with ardent affection. Nay, *glorying in the cross of Christ*, he feels himself, in a degree however, *thereby crucified to the world, and the world to him a.* The death is

a Gal. vi. 14.

gradual and lingering; but with every power of his soul he prays it may be sure and effectual.

6. Are his present *connections*, farther, the subject of his serious contemplation? His heart expands with benevolence to all mankind, but especially to those with whom friendship and nature have united him. A compassionate tear he drops over the sinner, who is laying violent hands on himself: and the humble convert, whose face is set towards the New Jerusalem, he congratulates. The good man, whatever be his complexion as to other things, he cordially embraces in the arms of his love: and to the man who hath injured him he hath no other return to make, but pity and forgiveness. In one word,

7. Does faith bring *heaven* near to the view of his mind? That idea of it which brightens the prospect, and affords the most animating pleasure to his heart, is the united perfection of purity and bliss which shall be there enjoyed. O happy place! where God is all in all; whence sin as well as sorrow shall be for ever excluded; and where holiness, arrayed in all the charms of divine love and joy, shall reign universal and without end. *When I awake* from the dust of death, may *I behold his face in righteousness*, and be for ever *satisfied with his likeness a.*

Thus have you a general view of the nature, spirit and tendency of true religion. And now, to close what hath been said, with how much reason may we,

1. Appeal to the judgments and consciences of all men, whether there is not a real excellency in what we have thus been describing. Could men but be persuaded to divest themselves for a while of their prejudices, and to listen to the sober dictates of their understanding, if they were honest, they would, they must say, that it is the most amiable object which can be presented to the human mind. It is not that cold, dry, lifeless business which the formal moralist would make it: nor is it that wild, rapturous, unmeaning thing, which the mad enthusiast would represent it. It is a rational, a substantial, a heavenly blessing; an emanation from the Deity, a spark of fire kindled in the soul by God, and *a well of water* in the heart *springing up into everlasting life b.* Nor let men, because they are themselves wholly estranged from the knowledge and fear of God,

a Psal. xvii. 15. b John iv. 14.

or because they can point out imperfections, follies and sins in the characters of the best Christians, from thence hastily conclude, that this account of religion is more ideal or imaginary. For, besides the professions of the worthiest men, and the testimony of the sacred Scriptures, there is the highest reason to suppose, from the account itself, that what is in its own nature so desirable may possibly have an existence. How much then,

2. Is it to be lamented that so little of real religion is to be found in our world! No subject perhaps hath more generally employed the attention of mankind, and yet none hath been more shamefully mistaken, perverted and abused. Some have so curiously refined upon it, and others have talked so much and so loudly about the circumstances of it, that the thing itself hath been overlooked, forgot, and very nigh lost. Can the good man forbear weeping, whilst he beholds this? O sad sight indeed!—the greatest part of the world by far, amidst their ready acknowledgments of the truth of religion, bidding open defiance to it! and the rest, most of them, by their very talk about it, hardened into a state of absolute insensibility to it! The plainest thing made a problem by dispute! and a matter the most substantial and important evaporating into mere air and smoke! Lament it, sincerely and heartily lament it, Christian; and with your tears mingle your fervent prayers to God, again to revive the dying interests of his kingdom in the world, and to spread the honours and triumphs of it far and wide. To close the whole,

3. Of what importance is it, that we each of us seriously examine ourselves, upon this question, whether God hath erected his kingdom in our hearts, and in what it consists, whether in *word*, or in *power!* Are we the bold opposers of religion? the nominal professors of it only? or the real partakers of the true spirit and temper of it? Unhappy man who ranks under either of the former characters! Remaining in this sad state to the last, he must endure the weight of *his* iron rod, whose mild and gracious sceptre he hath rejected and despised. But happy, thrice happy he, who, amidst all the remains of weakness and sin which attend him, can from his own experience attest the reality of religion, and to whom others will bear this honourable testimony, that *God is in him of a truth.*

DISCOURSE II.

THE REALITY OF RELIGION.

2 TIM. III. 5.——*Denying the power.*——

THE nature of serious religion having been considered in the former discourse, let us now enter into a full and particular proof of its *reality*. At first view indeed, it may seem unnecessary to prove a point, which carries its own evidence with it, and to the truth of which there is in the consciences of most men, I think I may say all, a very strong presumptive testimony. But since it is to be feared there are some, who would fain persuade themselves to question the reality of religion, and since it is notorious that the generality of mankind think very lightly about it; it cannot but be of considerable use to set the argument, plain as it is, in every light it will admit of, thereby to awaken our attention to the thing itself, as well as to remove every shadow of objection which may be urged against it.

It might then be very naturally expected, that our reasoning on this subject should be deduced from some short proposition, which is directly and fully to our purpose: but as Scripture for the most part takes it for granted, that there is such a thing as religion, so it is chiefly employed rather in a diffusive description of the *nature* of it, than in a concise and express affirmation of its *reality*. We are therefore obliged to ground our present enquiry on the passage just read, which, though it does not directly assert what we would prove, yet immediately leads us into the unhappy occasions of that scepticism and dissipation of mind, which too generally prevail; and so opens our way to the positive evidence we have of the truth of religion itself.

The apostle had been speaking in the beginning of this chapter, of *the last days*. A phrase which some interpret of the age immediately succeeding that of the first establishment of Christianity; and which others refer to a more distant period

of the church. But be that as it may, he tells us that in these days there would be *perilous times*. Times in which persecution on the one hand, and a general dissoluteness of manners on the other, would prevail to such a degree, as very greatly to try the faith and constancy of all the real professors of religion. From whence he goes on to give us the character of these last days. *Men shall be lovers of their ownselves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, truce-breakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, high-minded, and lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God.* To all which he subjoins the sad and striking description in our text: *Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof.* One would indeed have thought, that when men were arrived to such a pitch of wickedness as had been just represented, there could hardly have been any circumstance added, still farther to blacken their character. But there was yet one, *hypocrisy*, that put the finishing stroke to the whole. Amidst these bold impieties, so contrary to the dictates of reason, as well as of divine revelation, they dare to call themselves men of God and religion; and under the mask of external observances, they securely indulge the most diabolical passions, and with little or no remorse perpetrate the most horrid and shameful actions. So by their temper and conduct they *deny*, or contradict, the true spirit and *power* of that religion, the external appearance of which they fondly assume.

The language of the text is so expressive, and the uses to which we shall apply it so important, that it will be necessary to enquire a little more particularly, what is meant by *Godliness* —what by the *Form* and the *Power* of it—and who they are who *having* the one, do yet *deny* the other. And,

First, As to *Godliness*. The term properly signifies right or acceptable worship *a*: so that in the primary sense of it, it is to be restrained to acts of devotion, such as prayer and praise. Nevertheless it is commonly used to denote all that part of religion, which respects our temper and conduct towards God. Thus it is to be understood here, and thus it stands distinguished from the duties of temperance and justice in that pass-

a Εὐσέβεια.

age where the apostle exhorts us to live *soberly*, *righteously* and *godly* in the present world *a*. Wherefore godliness comprehends in it all the regards, which as creatures we owe to him who hath made us. And since by sin we are reduced to an apostate and depraved state, and God hath thought fit to give us an extraordinary revelation of his will; it follows, that there must of necessity be a change in some of the material expressions of our obedience, and in the manner it is to be performed. *Faith* in the Lord Jesus Christ, and *Repentance* towards God, are indispensably necessary to form the character of the godly. The man therefore who answers to this description, in the sense of the sacred Scriptures, is he who, being restored to the knowledge and favour of God, converses with him in his duties, imitates him in his practice, and hopes for ever to enjoy him in heaven; who, sensible that he hath forfeited the divine favour, considers his restoration to it as the fruit alone of the mediation of the Lord Jesus Christ; and, on this principle, humbly fears to offend him, and cheerfully aims to please him. Such is godliness or internal religion, the nature of which hath in the former discourse been fully considered, Now,

Secondly, As to the *Form* and the *Power* of it. These are terms which require very little explanation. Some indeed interpret the *form* of godliness in this place, of that rule or directory given us concerning it in the book of God, and which the apostle elsewhere calls the *form of sound words b*. And this many have in their hands, who it is to be feared are perfect strangers to the thing itself. Nay, too many there are, who, while they profess a regard to the *letter* of the Bible, take no small pains to explain away the *spirit* of it. But the phrase is rather to be understood of the external observances of religion, such as the assembling together for the worship of God, and for the celebration of the two solemn institutions of the Christian dispensation, baptism and the Lord's supper. These are the *forms* of godliness, the outward, natural, and just expressions of it. Now to these are opposed the *power* of it, that is, the inward sense, feeling and experience of it; that principle, spirit or temper, which animates a truly Christian man, just as the soul does the body. Such distinction the apostle frequent-

a Tit. ii. 12. *b* 2 Tim. i. 13.

ly makes: as when he says to the Thessalonians, *Our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power a:* and to Timothy, *Bodily exercise profiteth little, but godliness is profitable unto all things b.* Not that the *form* of religion and the *power* of it are at variance: no, the one, as was just observed, is the natural expression of the other. And so far is the word of God from treating the externals of religion with indifference, that it exhorts us with great earnestness to pay a serious attention to them, as the proper means, with a divine blessing, of begetting, maintaining, and promoting the true spirit of godliness. And most certain it is, that though there may be the *form*, where there is not the *reality* of religion; yet there cannot be the *reality* of religion, where there is not the *form* of it. But the latter is here opposed to the former, to intimate, that the one is a vain, unacceptable, useless thing without the other. And from hence we may now easily collect,

Thirdly, The true character of those who are said in our text *to have* the form of godliness, but at the same time *to deny* the power of it. They are either such who *rest in* the one, without any regard to the other; or such who assume the one, with an hypocritical view of being accounted the real possessors of the other. As to the first of these, few words are necessary to give us a just idea of their character. They place the whole of their religion in external rites and ceremonies, vainly imagining that positive observances will make them acceptable to God; while they pay no sort of attention to the prevailing temper of their hearts, and can perhaps allow themselves in some practices, which are absolutely immoral and criminal. Such there have been, and such it is to be feared there now are: nor is it to be doubted that they come within the description in the text. They have no true knowledge of the nature of spiritual religion, and have no just sense of the importance of it, if they do not even in speculation deny it. And then, as to those who hypocritically *assume* the form of religion, in order to gain the applause of men: however they may talk much of their regards to the power of godliness, it is as evident they can have no firm faith of its truth impressed on their hearts. Nay, their behaviour being in many instances wholly inconsistent

a 1 Thess. i. 5. *b* 1 Tim. iv. 8.

with their profession, men of atheistical and profane minds take occasion from hence to dispute the reality of what we would now prove. Thus you see how persons of both these characters, do either absolutely or in effect *deny* the grand thing, which in appearance they may seem to acknowledge. And in much the same sense the word is to be understood, where the apostle declares, that he who provides not for his own, and especially those of his own house, *hath denied the faith*, and is worse than an infidel *a*.

From this general view of the words, which we find exemplified in many sad instances before our own eyes, there appears then the highest reason for a particular consideration of the grand question proposed in this discourse. But in the meanwhile, it will be of use to inquire briefly into the principal *sources* of all that *doubt* and *scepticism*, which so much prevail in the world, with regard to the reality of internal and spiritual religion. And these are, the *enthusiasm* of some who call themselves Christians; the manifest *hypocrisy* of others who assume this venerable character; and the *averseness* of the depraved hearts of men in general to the thing itself, which is indeed the main cause of infidelity.

1. Prejudices against it have doubtless been confirmed, if not originally excited, by the *enthusiasm* of some mad pretenders to religion. Admitting that religion is a spiritual thing, it is easy to see how this view of it may give an opportunity to persons of a lively fancy, weak judgment, and heated passions, to ingraft that into it which does not belong to it; such as visions, dreams, ecstacies, and other whims which are the fruit of a distempered imagination. So its real appearance is changed, and the true end of it defeated. And thus assuming a monstrous form, it terrifies some into a kind of obedience to it, while by its absurdities it begets a hasty notion in others that it is all a delusion. In such manner, even good men of an enthusiastic turn of mind, have by overacting their part, undesignedly disgraced religion, and made many around them rather enemies than friends to what they would wish to promote. This, it is not to be doubted, is an engine of Satan's contrivance, and hath done infinite mischief in the world. Yet, whatever may

a 1 Tim. v. 9.

have been the reveries of some well-meaning Christians, they will by no means authorize the conclusions of atheists and infidels; but if rightly considered, will rather furnish a probable testimony in favour of the truth of religion. So likewise,

2. The *hypocrisy*, or the ill lives of some men who wear the mask of religion, is a common objection with vast numbers of people to the reality of it. And indeed at first view there seems something very plausible and natural in their usual way of reasoning on this sad circumstance. "Here are men, say they, who profess a high veneration for the scriptures, are very zealous in their attachment to positive institutions, affect the utmost preciseness and singularity in their appearance, and talk much of what they know, feel, and enjoy; and yet are guilty of the most shameful immoralities, such as covetousness, deceit, oppression, and dishonesty. What shall we say to this? If religion will not restrain its warmest advocates from vices the most hurtful to society, there surely can be no truth in it."

But the objection, however plausible at first view, is not fairly urged. The conduct of particular persons will not admit of so general an inference. The conclusion is just, that their behaviour gives the lie to *their* profession, and that they are themselves hypocrites and deceivers: but it doth not thence follow that religion itself is a delusion; unless it can be proved that it authorizes or countenances such a conduct. On the contrary, their assuming this sacred appearance, that they may the more easily impose upon others, and the more effectually compass their base designs, should rather lead us to conclude, as will hereafter more fully appear, that there probably is a reality in religion; since they act upon this very principle, that religion is generally supposed to make men good members of society, and that therefore wearing this habit, they shall be the less suspected of the evil they have in view. Nay, if there were not a notorious inconsistency between the professions and practices of such persons, they could not be justly deemed hypocrites, nor could there be any ground for the charge of deception. Which being the case, the objection ceases to have any real force in it. We see, however, from hence, the great importance of a Christian's conducting himself in such a manner as to preclude, if possible, all occasion for a kind of reasoning so

absurd in itself, and so dangerous in its tendecy. But that which hath the chief influence to beget and promote a sceptical temper is,

3. The *averseness* which prevails in every depraved mind to real godliness. Religion, as we have represented it, is a spiritual thing. It respects objects that are future and invisible. It forbids an immoderate attachment to sensible enjoyments. It lays a restraint on the propensities of nature. And it thwarts and opposes the most violent passions of the human heart. And thence, notwithstanding all the real and important blessings it proposes, it is disagreeable to an unrenewed mind. Now we know from frequent experience, that the will hath a considerable influence on the judgment; and that what we are not disposed to believe, we quickly find out various ways to persuade ourselves is not true. Here therefore we have the principal cause of all the doubt there is in the world concerning the reality of spiritual religion. Men do not like it; and so would fain rid themselves of the uneasiness, which the supposition of its truth occasions. This puts them upon having recourse to every little art their restless and depraved wits can devise, to weaken and obscure the evidence of what is thus so extremely irksome to them; till at length, having silenced the repeated clamours of conscience, and then very nearly put out the eye of reason itself, they dare, stupid and ignorant as they are, impudently to pronounce it all a lie.

For the conviction therefore of such persons if possible, or however to rouse the attention of the thoughtless, and to confirm the faith of the Christian, I shall endeavour to prove from a few plain topics the truth of serious religion; or in other words, that there is a *reality* as well *in the power*, as in the form of godliness.

PART II.

THE *reality* of religion, which is the point we have now to prove, may be argued,

I. From the *reason* and *nature* of the thing;

II. From the express *testimony* of scripture; and,

III. From the general *consent* of all mankind.

I. We begin with *the reason and nature of the thing.* What I here mean is, that certain principles being admitted, which are

either self-evident or are capable of a kind of proof which is no less satisfactory; it will clearly follow upon the most sound reasoning, that there must be a reality in spiritual and internal religion.

1. As to those principles which *the light of nature* teacheth, and which may be styled self-evident, as being generally acknowledged; a short review of these will enable us to describe the outlines of religion, and so to ascertain its truth. It will then be readily granted, that there is a God; that he is a spirit; that all perfection is to be ascribed to him; that we receive our beings, capacities, and every support and enjoyment from him; that he hath a right to our homage and obedience; that our chief happiness consists in his favour; that as rational creatures we are capable of knowing him, and conversing with him; and that he being an all-perfect spirit hath intimate access to our spirits. These are principles which need not be proved. And being admitted, the consequence is most obvious and necessary, that if the proper end of our existence be attained, there must be such a thing as contemplating the greatness and glory of God, fearing and loving him, trusting and delighting in him, submitting ourselves entirely to him, and at once imitating and obeying him. This is religion in its pure and primitive state; and these are the natural and genuine expressions of it, as it is felt and enjoyed by the blessed spirits above, in the highest perfection.

Now, as it is reasonable to expect, that a degree of this divine and heavenly attainment should be communicated to those, who, as will hereafter appear, are designed for that blissful world; so you clearly see that the chief business of it must respect *the inward temper and disposition of the heart.* Nay, such is our original frame and construction, that there is not one power of the human soul which is not capable of some one religious affection, and which is not the proper seat of it. So far then the idea of religion, as opposed to mere external form and appearance, stands approved by the plain dictates of reason and common sense. Men must renounce their reason, and become downright atheists, if they will affirm that it hath nothing to do with the heart of man, and respects only his outward behaviour. But since it is a further dictate of reason, that whatever dis-

coveries God is pleased to make of his will, they are all the proper objects of religion, and demand such dispositions and affections as are answerable to their nature; let us now go on,

2. To those *other notices* which he hath actually given us of himself, and of our condition both here and hereafter. The proofs indeed of their authenticity must be referred to the next head of discourse; but it is necessary that we here in general mention them, to complete our idea of religion, and to enable us from thence to argue its pure and spiritual nature. If it be a fact, then, that the soul of man is immortal, and will exist for ever in a future state either of happiness or of misery, that we are all guilty before God, and so all liable to his wrath; and that we are all through sin become unlike him, and so incapable while in an unrenewed state, of truly enjoying and serving him: if it be a fact, that God hath set forth Jesus his Son to be a propitiation for sin, and hath exhibited him in a great variety of other views, the most important to our present and future interests; and, in a word, if it be a fact, that the Holy Spirit is the author of all divine and heavenly grace, and that through his effectual influence the depraved nature is formed into the likeness of God, and fitted for the everlasting fruition of him: it follows, then, from *the reason and nature of the thing*, that religion must be that internal spiritual concern, it hath been represented in the preceding discourse.

The universal apostacy of mankind from God being acknowledged, it is a necessary consequence that we can have no intercourse again with heaven, without contrition and humiliation of heart; and that we cannot be saved and become happy, without being renewed in the spirit and temper of our minds. Now the very expressions of repentance and renovation, instantly convey a clear idea of what we would prove. So that these exercises of the soul are not the wild flights of enthusiasm, but real, substantial, rational religion. In like manner, the sacrifice and mediation of our Lord Jesus Christ being admitted, as the only ground of a sinner's reconciliation and acceptance with God, we at once see how faith, hope, love, and joy, enter deeply into the experience of the Christian, and become the main springs of that new life he lives, and of that new obedience he yields to the commands of God. The same also

may be said with respect to the influence and operation of the blessed Spirit, the exceeding great and precious promises of the Bible, and the glorious realities of a future world. Such is the nature of these doctrines that, if we assent to them as true, we must be sensible that they are adapted to strike the heart and conscience, and to influence all the dispositions and affections of the soul; and that therefore there is a reality as well in the power as the form of godliness. If God be a perfect and spiritual Being, the rational and spiritual natures with which he hath endowed us, must be employed in his service. If we are sinners and reconciled to him, the notion of our guilt and his mercy teaches us our obligations to faith and repentance. If the Son of God be set before us as our Mediator and Saviour, the Holy Spirit as our Guide and Comforter, and the joys of heaven as our everlasting portion; there must be excited in our breasts affections suited to these discoveries, such as hope, confidence, delight, submission and obedience.

But it will be said, whence does the reality of all these supposed objects of religion appear? For an answer to this inquiry, we shall therefore now immediately hasten to the

II. General head of argument, *the express testimony of scripture.* And here we will in a few words shew—that the discoveries which have been just mentioned, as the principal grounds of religion, are the plain dictates of the Bible—that this sacred book doth thence expressly infer the reality of spiritual and internal religion—and then, that the book itself comes supported with all the evidence of divine testimony, which can be reasonably desired.

1. It can hardly be questioned that what hath been affirmed of the soul of man, of his present fallen condition, and of the method of his recovery to the favour and likeness of God, is the plain language of the Bible. As to the soul, it assures us that its nature is spiritual and immortal; that however men may kill the body, they have not this power over the conscious spirit within *a*; and that immediately on its departure hence, it is either happy, to use the figurative language of our Saviour, *in the bosom of Abraham*, or being in hell, *lifts up its eyes in torment b.* As to the present state of mankind, it is declared

a Matt. x. 28. *b* Luke xvi. 23.

to be depraved and apostate; that whereas *God made man upright, he hath sought out many inventions a;* and that *there is none that doeth good, no not one b.* So that the *whole world being guilty, he hath concluded all under sin c;* and *if he were strict to mark iniquity no one could stand in his sight d.* As to our recovery from these guilty and degenerate circumstances, it is expressly declared to be by the mediation, sacrifice and righteousness of Emmanuel, God with us: that *in him, the beloved, we are accepted e;* that *through his blood we have remission of sin f;* and that *by his obedience many are made righteous g.* And in a word, as to the application of the blessings of the new covenant to the hearts of men, we are assured it is by the influence and operation of the Divine Spirit: so we are said to be *born of the Spirit h, who is given unto us i;* and *dwelleth in us k;* and *saved by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost l.* Thus, *as sin hath reigned unto death, grace reigneth through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord m.* Thus, *through Christ we have access by faith into the grace wherein we stand n.* And thus *we rejoice in hope of the glory of God, having his love shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us o.* Such are some of the main doctrines which Divine revelation teaches, interspersed through almost every page of sacred writ, and illustrated by a variety and copiousness of expression, which will not admit of a particular recital in this place. And now,

2. What are the inferences which the Scriptures hence draw as to the nature of religion? They are such as plainly shew it to be that rational, spiritual and practical exercise of the mind and heart, which hath been already so fully represented. *God is a spirit, and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth p. He desireth truth in the inward parts q,* and *looketh not on the outward appearance, but on the heart r;* wherefore *with the mind we* must *serve the Lord s.*

a Eccl. vii. 29. *b* Rom. iii. 12. *c* Rom. iii, 19. Gal. iii. 22.
d Psal. cxxx. 3. *e* Eph. i. 6. *f* Matt. xxvi. 28.
g Rom. v. 19. *h* John iii. 6. *i* Rom. v. 5.
k 1 Cor. iii. 13. *l* Tit. iii. 5. *m* Rom. v. 21.
n Rom. v. 2. *o* Rom. v. 5. *p* John iv. 24.
q Psal. li. 6. *r* 1 Sam. xvi. 7. *s* Rom. vii. 25.

His kingdom is not in word but in power a: it is not meat and drink; but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost b: it cometh not with external shew and *observation, but is within us c. We are,* if good men, *the temples of the living God d, his habitation through the Spirit e,* enlightened by his pure word, and perfumed with the sweet incense of his grace. *He dwells in us and walks in us f.* His grace is *the anointing which we have received of God, and which abideth in us g.* The good *seed* which he hath sown in the heart, and *which remaineth* there *h.* And *the water of life which he hath given unto us, and which is in us a well of water springing up unto everlasting life i.* It is *the hidden man of the heart, and that apparel which is not corruptible,* and *which is in the sight of God of great price k.* In short, *the fruits of it are love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness and temperance l.* So that *he is not a Jew,* that is, a man of real religion, *who is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision which is outward in the flesh: but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter, whose praise is not of men but of God m.*

Thus do the sacred records every where describe the nature, and assert the reality of serious religion, assuring us that the heart is the grand seat of it, and exemplifying the genuine effects of it, with the various weaknesses and imperfections which attend it, in the writings and lives of the most eminent patriarchs, prophets, and apostles, who have flourished in the church of God. And if,

3. The scriptures, which thus ascertain the grounds of religion, and from thence infer the spiritual and practical nature of it, shall clearly appear to be a book divinely inspired, and truly containing the mind and will of God, the grand point to be proved will surely be established by the fullest and best evidence. And who can with any pretence of reason question the divinity of this book, while he reflects on the character of the writers of it? Men who, as they affirmed they were inspired of

a 1 Cor. iv. 20. *b* Rom. xiv. 17. *c* Luke xvii. 20, 21.
d 2 Cor. vi. 16. *e* Eph. ii. 22. *f* 2 Cor. vi. 16.
g 1 John ii. 27. *h* 1 John iii. 9. *i* John iv. 14.
k 1 Pet. iii. 4. *l* Gal. v. 22, 23. *m* Rom. ii. 28, 29.

God, so appear, by their plain and nervous manner of writing, to have been no enthusiasts, on the one hand; and, by their upright and unblameable lives, to have been no impostors, on the other. Men who boldly withstood the prevailing passions and prejudices of mankind, exposed themselves hereby to the greatest inconveniences and sufferings, and many of them actually laid down their lives in confirmation of the doctrine they taught. Who can admit a suspicion of the truth of this book, while he duly considers the antiquity and simplicity of it; the purity, excellence and sublimity of the discoveries it makes; and the many wonderful facts it relates, especially the miracles, death, resurrection and ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ, all which are supported by the most natural and convincing testimony? Who can doubt of this, while he farther takes into his account the various prophecies therein contained, the exact accomplishment of some of them in former ages, as appears by profane as well as sacred history, and the fulfilment of others in our own times, particularly those respecting the present state of *Judaism*, *Popery* and *Mahometanism?* To which must be added the amazing success and spread of the gospel upon the first publication of it, and the admirable fruits it hath uniformly produced in the hearts and lives of men, wherever it hath been dispensed in its native and genuine simplicity. Nor have we any reason to doubt that the Bible hath been truly conveyed down to us; since, besides all the other evident marks of authenticity which are clearly to be seen upon it, the New Testament, with which the Old stands intimately and necessarily connected, is sufficiently proved to be incorrupt, by the many versions it very early received into various different languages, and by the numerous citations made from it by some of its bitterest enemies.

The principles of religion being thus laid down, and the spiritual nature of it thence expressly inferred, in a book which thus evidently appears to have come from God, the point to be proved is, you see, established by divine authority. We are assured, as if by a voice from heaven, that *godliness* is not a mere form, but that there is a real, substantial, vital energy in it, and that it is in truth, *the word of God, which effectually worketh in all them that believe.*

PART III.

It now remains that we complete the evidence which hath been adduced, by adding,

III. *The consent of mankind in general*, at some season or other of their lives, to this important truth. And however sceptical or unbelieving some men may be, and however the conduct of others may contradict their profession; yet we may be bold to affirm, that this hath been, and still is the case.

1. Let the man of *a dissolute and profane character* stand forth and say, whether, amidst all his ignorance, folly and impiety, he hath not, on some occasion at least, felt an alarming attestation in his breast to the divinity of religion. There is such a thing surely as conscience. And that, like a faithful monitor, hath in a thousand instances been heard to say, "*Verily there is a reward for the righteous, there is a God who judgeth in the earth.* His eye is upon thee; and all thy thoughts, dispositions and resolutions, as well as all thine outward actions, *he will one day bring into judgment.*" Yea conscience hath assumed the character of a judge, as well as a monitor, arraigned the sinner at its awful tribunal, entered into the secrets of his heart, and having accused, convicted and condemned him, hath as it were ordered him forth to execution. And Oh! the extreme anguish of the wicked, while they have thus heard the just sentence of divine wrath pronounced in their ears; and have felt the beginnings of future misery, in all the fear, shame and confusion which the present apprehension of it excites. How have their countenances changed, like Belshazzar's at the sight of the finger against the wall! And how have *their thoughts troubled them, so that the joints of* their *loins have been loosed*, and their *knees have smote one against another!* To such checks, such starts, such fits of melancholy, or whatever other name may be given it, few wicked men are perfect strangers. And though, when the paroxysm is over, and the violence of their fears is somewhat abated, they may take pains to persuade themselves out of a belief of the just and natural consequence of these convictions, by fond conceits of superstition, imagination and bodily disorder; yet surely they cannot coolly reflect on what hath passed, without shrewdly suspecting that

there is such a thing as religion, and that conscience is the counterpart of God's holy word. Such then are the feelings of the profligate.

And, admitting that there are some few of this character, who in the midst of life and health have the happiness, as they judge it, to escape these tempests within; there are nevertheless innumerable instances of bad men, who, in the immediate view of an eternal world, have been obliged to join issue with the Bible, and to acknowledge in the presence of surrounding spectators, that this is *no cunningly devised fable*, but a most important reality. And however even the soberer part of mankind may, too many of them, think lightly of the inward power of *godliness*; yet, when the interesting scenes of a future state are very nearly before their eyes, there are few of them but do acknowledge, either directly or indirectly, that something more is necessary to make them meet for the enjoyment of God, than that general decency of external conduct in which they have unhappily placed the essence of religion. Thus you see the men who *deny the power of godliness*, whether we take them from among the openly profane, or those of only a mere moral behaviour, they are all obliged, at some time or other of their lives, to fall in with the convictions of conscience, and to submit to the mighty force of truth. But to their testimony may be added,

2. That of *hypocrisy* itself. A kind of proof this which, however unnatural it may seem at first view, will on examination appear no less rational and convincing than that just mentioned. Hypocrites, it is well known, freely and openly declare their firm faith of the truth of serious religion. But it is not to their professions, however positive and clamorous, that any regard is here paid, since it is agreed on all hands that they are bad men, and that therefore their word is not to be credited, especially in a matter wherein it is their interest to deceive. *They have not put off the old man*, as some one expresses it, *but only put the new upon it.* Yet, from a contemplation of the entire character, motives and conduct of such persons, an inference may be drawn, which amounts to at least a very strong presumptive proof of the grand point in question. A hypocrite is one who assumes a character which does not belong

to him, in order thereby to impose upon others, and so gain some advantage to himself. Now the character he assumes must itself have something excellent and pleasing in it, and must be supposed to have a real existence somewhere, otherwise his assuming it could be of no advantage to him at all. No designing man would, in order to gain the confidence and esteem of another, put on an appearance which is unfavourable and very generally disapproved; or pretend to that which is in its own nature impossible, or however most unlikely to be deemed true.

To apply this then to matters of religion. Here is one who confidently affirms he is what a man of godliness hath been represented to be. It is admitted that he is not such a person, that he aims to deceive, and that he expects to acquire some worldly emolument thereby. But does it hence follow, that *godliness*, the appearance of which he hath thus drawn like a vail over his iniquity, is itself a delusion? No surely. There rather hence arises a very strong presumption in favour of the truth of it. For if this man be artful, as most hypocrites are, it is hardly imaginable that he would set up a claim to what has no foundation at all, either in excellency or in truth. It is therefore, on the contrary, the plain language of his conduct, that the character he mimics is a possible and probable one, that it is truly excellent and venerable, and moreover that wise and good men have actually professed it, and been generally supposed to be endowed with it. For if thus much be not admitted, hypocrisy would be a mighty harmless thing, and the pretender to religion would rather deserve the name of an enthusiast than a deceiver.

To the resentment then which mankind commonly feel at the very name of a hypocrite we may appeal, for at least the high probability of the truth of religion. There cannot be a semblance without a reality, a shadow without a substance, a picture without an original. Wherever therefore we see a hypocrite, we have a clear and undeniable proof before our eyes, that some worthy persons do profess religion, and likewise a strong presumptive evidence that what they thus profess is true. Thus one of the sharpest and most successful weapons, which hath ever been employed in the service of infidelity, may with a very

little reflection, be wrested out of its hands, and turned with double fury on itself. And thus, a vice the most detestable of all others, may in some sort atone for the infinite mischief it hath done in the world, by becoming an able advocate for the truth it once persecuted and abused. But there are other witnesses to be examined on this important question, who, though they may be prejudiced in favour of the fact they attest, yet justly merit an impartial hearing. These are,

3. *Good men.* By good men we here mean those who are generally acknowledged to be such, who, whether religion be or be not true, are amiable patterns of virtue, and useful members of society. Now if persons of this character do most, if not all of them, profess a regard to the *power of godliness;* if what they profess hath in its own nature a tendency to excite them to a conduct thus excellent and praise-worthy; if they assure us that it is this sense of religion upon their spirits which disposes them to behave in this manner; if they adhere to their profession amidst all opposition; and, in a word, if they express their satisfaction as to the truth and importance of religion, when in the immediate views of death; their testimony, added to the proofs already brought, must surely set this matter with every impartial mind, beyond a doubt.

It is indeed acknowledged that there may be persons of an external good behaviour, whose motives rise no higher than mere principles of humanity and good nature. But it is a fact not to be disputed, that the most respectable and worthy characters which have adorned the world, and to which even infidels themselves have borne an honourable testimony, have been found among the friends of serious religion. Integrity, meekness, benevolence, and the other social virtues, have ever been the offspring of a lively faith of the gospel of Christ. *The grace of God, which bringeth salvation, teacheth men to deny all ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live righteously, and soberly, and godly in the present evil world a.* Such is the very spirit of the Christian institution. When therefore the good man declares that it thus operates on his heart, his declaration, so entirely consonant to every dictate of sound reason, and so well supported by the general course of his life, may justly demand

a Tit. ii. 11, 12.

our credit; especially when we see him persisting in this his profession, amidst all the contempt and obloquy cast upon him by a profane world, and even in the extreme moments of life, when it is beyond the power of the most refined hypocrisy to conceal the genuine sentiments of the heart.

Let us figure to ourselves, then, the man of religion in his real and proper character, and say whether a strong presumptive evidence of the truth of godliness does not hence force itself on our consciences. Nor will we exalt the Christian above humanity, or dress him in the fair habit which flattery may have too often given him: but we will view him as he is, a frail, imperfect sinful man; yet behaving under the commanding influence of those divine truths he professes, and labouring to adorn them by a holy and unblameable conversation. Behold him, then, honest in his dealings, faithful to his engagements, and chaste in his connections; daily lamenting innumerable mistakes, yet afraid of sin and of every distant approach to it; using the world to the purposes of cheerfulness and benevolence, yet not abusing it to covetousness or profligacy; fearful of temptation, yet resolutely opposing it; feeling his afflictions, yet not daring to murmur at them; aiming to do good, though often disappointed in his attempts: in fine, a lover of good men, a friend of society, and a blessing to all around him. And now hear him, his character thus established, pronouncing religion in the light it hath been represented, a substantial and important truth, openly professing it in the face of the whole world, and renouncing his temporal interests for the sake of it. Hear all this and say, whether a testimony, thus authenticated, ought not, will not have weight with every thoughtful mind.

But if this does not satisfy, if a secret dislike of religion still forces on the mind a doubt of the good man's sincerity, follow him to his dying bed, see him lying thereon, with a cheerful composure of mind, and take from his own lips the evidence he faithfully gives in favour of what he hath dared to profess, and what hath been the governing principle of his life. "*Verily*, says he, *there is a reward for the righteous, there is a God who judgeth in the earth.* This hath been my firm faith, and is now the joy of my heart. Religion is a reality; its power I feel, its supports I enjoy. In God I have put my trust, and he is faith-

ful and good. *To Christ I have committed* my everlasting interests, and *he is able to keep* them *against that day.* Heaven, unworthy as I am, I hope shortly to possess, and to possess it as *the free gift of God through Jesus Christ my Lord.* O how my heart aspires to that pure and exalted state! Thanks be to the good Spirit of God, *who hath wrought me for this self-same thing. I have waited, O Lord, for thy salvation*—I have seen it—*let* me *now depart in peace—into thy hands I resign my spirit.*" The force of such evidence is hardly to be withstood —the heart feels it—the conscience yields to it. And that this hath been the fact in many pleasing instances, is not to be questioned.

Thus we have, I hope, fully proved the truth of internal religion, from the *reason and nature of the thing*, from *the express testimony of Scripture*, and from *the general consent of mankind.* What remains now, but that we spend a few moments—in expostulating with the unbeliever on his folly and madness—in reproaching the disingenuity and baseness of the hypocrite—and in congratulating the Christian on the real happiness he possesses?

1. Is there a man, who, after what hath been said, can lay his hand upon his breast, and say he firmly believes that the religion of the heart is all a fable? One should imagine it is impossible. But if such an instance is to be found, we may be bold to affirm, and that without any breach of charity, that a sentence thus pronounced in favour of vice and sin, can never be the genuine dictate of the conscience. To believe that religion is all a lie, is a kind of faith which one should suspect, is too hard to be attained by a human mind: a mystery, I had just said, beyond any thing the Bible reveals. No. Unbelief is the proper offspring of a judgment unnaturally overpowered and prostituted by sense.

Say not then that you have reason on your side; no one sober dictate of it can support you in your infidelity. While, therefore, you treat this great object with contempt and ridicule, you betray a weakness and folly, which will be an eternal reproach to your understanding; and a bitterness and enmity of heart, which will one day bring upon you inexpressible misery. What if all you have heard should happen to prove true? how great

will be your confusion in the hour of death! and how great your surprise the instant you launch into eternity! How will you lift up your eyes before the tribunal of that God, whose revealed will you have trampled under foot, and whose reasonings by the voice of conscience itself you have rejected and despised! *O consider these things, ye that forget God, lest he tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver a.* But to hasten,

2. If the condemnation of the infidel will be dreadful, how much more that of the hypocrite!—the man who, in order to answer some secular purposes to himself, puts on the *form of godliness*, while he inwardly *denies the power* of it, and laughs at the whole as a cheat. A more unnatural, base, and detestable character than this cannot be imagined. It exposes a person to the resentments both of the good and the bad, and betrays a meanness which renders him absolutely unworthy of society. Whether religion be or be not true, such a man must in the end be a loser. If it be not true, though he escapes future misery, yet it is a thousand to one, but his hypocrisy is suspected, and of consequence his schemes defeated; however, it is certain that, sooner or later, he must sink into contempt in the opinion of all around him.

But if, on the other hand, religion should prove true, what tenfold vengeance will fall on the guilty head of this wretched man, in the great day of account!—that day when the secrets of all hearts shall be laid open, and the God of truth shall, with the loud applause of angels and men, and indeed the full approbation of the condemned himself, frown him from his presence into the lake of fire and brimstone which burneth for evermore. No excuse can be offered for him, and every circumstance which can be imagined will crowd upon him to aggravate his guilt and heighten his misery. Bethink yourself, O man, in time. Religion is true. Ask your conscience, and it will tell you so. Increase not then your guilt by your hypocrisy. Neither in this way bring the blood of any others around you on your own head. But throw the mask aside. Acknowledge your sin, and *pray God, if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you b.* To close the whole,

a Psal. l. 22. b Acts viii. 22.

3. And lastly, How great, Christian, is your felicity! You have believed religion to be a reality, and have found it to be so in your own experience. You have the *witness in yourself*, and you have the pleasure to see every other kind of testimony concurring with this of your own mind and conscience. Few, indeed, around you are duly affected with this great concern; yet few dare look you in the face and say it is all a deception. But though the whole world did think differently from you, if, nevertheless, you have the Bible, and the feelings of your own heart, on your side, what will it signify? And though in the end you should be mistaken, yet you will have no cause to repent that you have given firm credit to such matters as have tended to make you a happier and better man, and a more cheerful and useful member of society. But the truth is great, and it will prevail. Religion is a reality, and built on such principles as cannot deceive. Rejoice then, O believer, amidst all the contempt that is cast upon you by a profane and wicked world. Rejoice in the truth. Place a firm confidence in Christ as your Saviour, and 'give all diligence to make your calling and election sure.' Be confirmed in the grounds of your faith, and pray to God that the fruits of it may so appear in your heart and life, as to put the truth of religion itself, and your own interest in it, beyond all dispute. And look forward with pleasure and triumph to that day, when all doubt and scepticism shall be for ever absorbed and lost, in the brightness and certainty of the heavenly world.

DISCOURSE III.

THE SAMENESS OF RELIGION.

1 Cor. xii. 13.—*And have been all made to drink into one spirit.*

It is a reflection highly pleasing to a serious mind, that religion, the nature and reality of which we have explained and

proved, is one and the same thing in every good man. Nor is there in this argument entertainment only, but the most important use; for, on the one hand, it tends to obviate a very plausible objection, which hath often been urged against the truth of religion, as if it were not of divine original, because it hath, and doth assume such various external appearances; and, on the other, it happily tends to promote a firm union and a cordial affection among all those who are interested in this heavenly blessing. Nor could fitter language be used to convey this cheerful and improving idea of real godliness, than that in our text; whether we be Jews or Gentiles, bond or free, if we truly fear God, *we have been all made to drink into one spirit.*

The apostle had been discoursing at large concerning spiritual gifts, of which he tells the Corinthians, there was a very great diversity in the church of God. But reflecting how much they were disposed to animosities and divisions, which was indeed the principal occasion of his writing this epistle, he reminds them, that whatever variety of gifts there might be among them, there was but one Spirit whence they all proceeded; and that the great end for which they were given was likewise but one, even the general edification of the whole. This leads him into a very apt and familiar comparison of the church with the natural body. *As the body,* says he in the preceding verse, *is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ.* "As the natural body, though composed of many members, whose situation, strength, use, and beauty are various, is but one body; so the church of Christ, though it consists of many individuals, whose stations, abilities, and usefulness, may be various, is likewise but one body, of which Jesus Christ is the head." *For,* adds he, *by one spirit we are all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free: and have been all made to drink into one spirit.* A manifest allusion there is here to the two institutions, of baptism and the Lord's supper. By the former, which is an emblem of regeneration, we are initiated into the church, incorporated and joined together, declared to be the disciples of Jesus, and so to make one body. And by the latter, which exhibits a lively representation of the doctrine and grace of Christ, we profess to *drink into one*

spirit, to have the same divine temper diffused through all our hearts, and to be knit together in affection and love. To much the same purpose he expresses himself in another place, where he is professedly speaking of this sacred rite, 'We being many are one bread *a*.'

Now by this figurative mode of speech in the text, the apostle would further instruct us, not only that the many members which compose the church of Christ, do in fact make one body; but likewise that there is a *sameness* in the religion itself, as it hath been already explained, which thus unites them to one another. This is admirably illustrated by the distinction he observes between the soul and body, and their union in one person. The body and soul are the two parts which constitute a man. As the body, with all its members, is but one; so the soul, with all its various powers and affections, is but one likewise: and these two united make but one man. In like manner, as the several individuals which compose the church of God, however scattered through the world, and however different in their external aspect and appearance, make but one body; so this body is inhabited and quickened by one spirit. It is in a sense one soul, one mind, one temper, which possesses all good men. At the table of our Lord we all drink of one cup; and thus in the great business of religion *we all drink into one spirit*: we are of the same nature, and make as it were one person.

But if we consider the words detached from either of these allusions, the sense will very well agree with other metaphorical descriptions of religion in the book of God, and upon the whole amount to the same thing. We often read of *water*, of *living water*, of *drawing water out of the wells of salvation*, and of *thirsting* and *drinking b*. By which expressions are undoubtedly meant the inward spirit and experience of religion, with the many comforts and blessings of it. Now, says the apostle, whatever be our character or circumstances in other respects, yet having felt the renewing influence of the grace of God, *we have been all made to drink into one spirit*. We have all hungered and thirsted after righteousness, have all been led to the same fountain-head, and have all, in our different proportion,

a 1 Cor. x. 17. *b* John iv. 14. vii. 38.—Isa. xli. 3.

drank of the same divine blessings which freely and largely flow thence. So he expresses himself, speaking of the fathers of the Old Testament church, *They did all eat the same spiritual meat, and did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual rock which followed them; and that rock was Christ* a.

Upon the whole then, the sense of the words is manifestly this, that religion, in regard of the internal, spiritual and practical part of it, is uniformly the same in every good man. Now, in order to the right improvement of this proposition, we will,

I. Briefly descant on that *diversity* of natural and external circumstances, which often attends the experience and practice of religion.

II. Inquire wherein consists that *uniformity*, which the text assures us there is in religion itself. And then,

III. Point out the *grounds* and *reasons* of this, which will serve to prove the truth of the observation, and still farther to explain and illustrate it.

I. As to that *diversity* of natural and external circumstances which attends the profession of religion; it will be necessary to take a general view of it, in order to set the contrast in the stronger light, and especially as the apostle himself directs us to it in the very text. And,

1. It is obvious to every one, that there is a wide difference among those who fear God, in respect of their *outward and worldly circumstances*. Religion is not confined to any particular nation or age of the world, nor to any particular rank or condition of men. It is not a blessing peculiar to the Christian æra, to this country, or to the poor only. One may be a Greek, and another a Jew; one a Barbarian, and another a Scythian; one bond, and another free. The water of life, like the river of paradise, spreads itself through various and distinct parts of the earth; and sometimes springs up in hearts where we little expect to find it, and without any external or visible means of communication. The young and the old, the rich and the poor, the honourable and the despised, have all of them, that is, some of each condition, drank into the same spirit. Here we shall see one clothed in rags, whose inner man is nevertheless adorn-

a 1 Cor. x. 3, 4.

ed with that apparel which is incorruptible, and in the sight of God of great price. And there again another in affluent circumstances, and in an exalted station of life, who is nevertheless poor in spirit, and judges it his chief honour that he ranks among the humble disciples of the meek and lowly Jesus: a prince on a throne, and a peasant in a cottage; a Job and a Solomon, a Lazarus and a Daniel. No uniformity is necessary in regard of these things. In like manner,

2. There is a remarkable difference among good men as to their *intellectual capacities*, and their *natural tempers*. These, be they what they may, are not the tests by which the characters of the disciples of Jesus are to be decisively determined. That is to say, the man who in respect of natural endowments is a fool, or but one remove from that denomination, may yet be enriched with divine wisdom. And he who was born with a ruggedness of disposition, which is not to be entirely mastered in the present life, may yet have his heart in the main right towards God. And so, on the other hand, it would be very perverse to suppose, that either good sense, or good nature, are any real obstructions to true religion. Fact sufficiently confirms the justness of these observations.

Many serious Christians we perhaps daily converse with, who hardly know how to reason upon the plainest point; while some here and there are possessed of powers so refined and exalted, as to render them capable of the closest thought, and of the most curious and abstruse speculations. And so as to natural temper; how soft, mild and gentle is the disposition of some! and how sharp, perverse and unyielding that of others! The apostles Peter and John are remarkable instances of this variety in the temperament, if I may so express it, of their animal spirits. The one is hot, bold and precipitate, the other soft, tender and affectionate. And it is, I imagine, this difference of natural constitution, which gives rise to those various appearances we see religion often assume. The weakness of their intellects will not allow some Christians to discern, with that clearness that might be wished, the consistency of divine truths, and their mutual dependence on each other. And the sharpness of their wits is mighty apt to tempt others into refinements, which are of a very trifling nature, if not of a hurtful tendency.

Hence that variety of sentiment among even good men themselves, about those matters which affect not the vitals of religion. But most of the dissensions which prevail in the Christian church, are rather owing to some unhappy defect in men's tempers than in their judgments. It is not their religion which makes them at all unkind and severe, and so alienates and divides them. Religion does, in a good degree, cure these disorders of the mind, and prevent the ill effects of them. Allowance is however to be made for the consideration, that nature hath not cast them all in the same mould; while at the same time we admit that the grace of God 'hath made them all drink into the same spirit.' Again,

3. The difference may be considerable in respect of the particular *dispensations, forms and means of religion* they may be under. The same degree of light hath not been enjoyed, nor hath the same mode of worship obtained from the beginning. The knowledge of the Messiah was gradually increasing through the Antediluvian, the Patriarchal and the Mosaic, to the Christian age. And as one dispensation by divine appointment succeeded another, so each produced a change in the means of religion, which grew more and more instructive and animating, the nearer they advanced to the simplicity and spirituality of the gospel state. But this produced no alteration in religion itself: that remained immutably the same. The men of God before the flood, *drank into the same spirit* with those who flourished in the time of the prophets; and these again were saved in the very same way, and shared in the same divine temper, with those whose happy lot hath fallen under the clear light of the Christian dispensation. 'The gospel was preached unto the fathers as well as unto us: and they all did eat of the same spiritual meat, and did all drink of the same spiritual drink, even of the rock that followed them, which rock was Christ *a*.' The immediate disciples of Jesus were men of true religion, as well amidst the darkness which veiled their apprehensions during his ministry on earth, as amidst that divine light, which shone around them on the day of Pentecost. The Jews worshipped God in a manner very different from us; but their forms, I mean as used by good men, were animated with the same

a Heb. iv. 2.—1 Cor. x. 3, 4.

spirit, which is the life and glory of those fewer and plainer institutions in use among us. And though some of the wisest and best men of this and the preceding ages, have differed in their opinions concerning the circumstantials both of the doctrine and discipline of the Christian church; yet it would be the height of madness, and I will add impiety too, to question their uniformity in the great business of religion itself. And however some Christians stand distinguished from others in regard of the excellency, purity and spirituality of those means they enjoy; yet their experiences of divine things most certainly are, and indeed necessarily must be, similar. So again,

4. The diversity there is of *spiritual gifts* infers no real diversity as to religion itself. A circumstance I the rather mention, as the apostle so largely insists on it in this context. 'There are differences,' says he, 'of administrations, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all. To one is given the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge; to another faith; to another the gifts of healing; to another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another discerning of spirits; to another divers kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues; but all is of one God, who divideth to every man, severally as he will *a*;' and every man, however characterized or distinguished by these gifts, if he be a Christian indeed, 'hath been made to drink into the same spirit.' Miracles, it is true, are now ceased; yet the observation, so far as it respects that variety of talents for usefulness with which one Christian is distinguished from another, is equally applicable to the present times. Whatever these may be, whether for public rule and instruction in the church of God, or for private counsel and edification, they very well consist, and indeed are only truly amiable, when connected with that charity, divine love, or spiritual religion, without which the apostle assures us in the very next chapter after the text, they are all nothing. To which it is to be added once more,

5. That there may be, and often is a difference as to the *degree* of religion, though it retains the same nature. An observation this so common, that it needs little or no illustration.

a 1 Cor. xii. 5, 6, 8, 9, 10.

There are, in the language of Scripture, *babes*, *young men*, and *fathers* in Christ; some weak, and others strong in faith; some eminent for the purity of their devotion, the warmth of their love, and the cheerfulness of their obedience; and others in whose hearts are to be seen the sparks only of this divine fire. And yet Christians are all children of the same Father, partakers of the same nature, and initiated into the same religion.

Such then is the diversity of natural and external circumstances, which often attend the experience and profession of religion.

PART II.

Let us now then turn our eyes from these circumstances to the thing itself, and enquire,

II. Wherein consists that *uniformity* in religion, which our text mentions as a peculiar commendation of its real and intrinsic excellency.

By the *sameness* of religion is here meant, the exact similarity there is in the spirit and temper of all good men. As the several individuals of mankind are all made of one blood, and as the same faculty of reason, in a greater or less degree, is common to each of the human species; so what the Scripture calls 'a new creature *a*,' is one divine or spiritual nature common to all the people of God. And this is precisely the same now as it was in the beginning, and will indeed ever continue immutably the same in every age, in every part of the world, and in every heart which is renewed by the grace of God. It is what our Saviour calls the *one* thing needful *b*. Here then our business is not immediately with the doctrines of religion, these being rather the objects of it, than the thing itself. Though it is most certain, that as truth can be but one, so the apprehensions of all good men concerning it, must exactly correspond in regard of those particulars of it, which do immediately affect the existence of the *new nature* in the heart. Nor can we speak of inward piety, without keeping in view the grand objects of it, which have been more or less clearly revealed to the minds of men, according as the infinite wisdom and goodness of God have judged most fit and necessary.

a 2 Cor. v. 17. *b* Luke x. 42.

Now the main expressions of inward religion may be comprised in this short account of it. It first *humbles the heart* of man—then *inspires it with divine hopes and joys*—by this means *refines and sanctifies it*—and so *makes it capable of pure love and exalted friendship.* And in respect of each of these particulars there is an exact *uniformity*, at least in a degree, among all the people of God. They *have all been made to drink into the same spirit.*

1. Religion *humbles* and abases the heart before God. Where is the good man to be found, who hath not been struck with an awful apprehension of the truth and dignity of the divine perfections, and with a deep sense of his own vileness and unworthiness? While faith presents the blessed God to our view in his infinite omniscience, his spotless purity, his almighty power, and his transcendent glory, we vanish into nothing before him. The lively display of these his attributes in the works of nature and providence, in the righteous dictates of his holy law, and the propitiatory sufferings of his own Son, commands our homage and dread. We admire and wonder, adore and tremble. And so turning our eyes inward on ourselves, traversing our hearts through the various and secret mazes of vanity and sin, observing how unlike we are to the pure and perfect God, and how short we come of our obligations to his holy law, reflecting on the pollution of our natures, and the aggravated guilt of our lives; we are covered with shame at this sad scene, and readily acknowledge ourselves *the chief of sinners.* And then, conceiving some hope of the mercy of God, through the great atonement he hath appointed, we feel the relentings of a broken heart for all our ingratitude, and the sensations of real grief for all our folly and sin.

Now these experiences, which are the beginning of religion, and which accompany the Christian all his way through life, are the feelings of every good man. There is an entire similarity here. The myriads of sinners who have been saved, from the beginning of time to the present moment, of whatever nation, kindred or tongue, have all been inspired with these sentiments, and all been affected with these sensations. If we go back to Patriarchal times, and ask the faithful in those days, what they thought of God and themselves; their answer will

correspond exactly with the account we have just given. Good old Jacob will tell us, that when the Lord appeared to him, such an awful reverence of the great God was impressed upon his spirits, as obliged him to cry out, *How dreadful is this place a!* And will add, that when he contemplated his own nature, with the frailty and guilt that attended it, he judged himself *unworthy of the least of God's mercies b.* With him Job, that upright and perfect man, will agree, assuring us, that having not only heard of the Lord with the hearing of the ear, but with the eye seen him, *he abhorred himself, and repented in dust and ashes c.* Isaiah, in after times, will talk the same language: *Wo is me, for I am undone, because I am a man of unclean lips d.* Daniel in the court of Belshazzar, amidst all the honours conferred on him, will tremble before the great God, and acknowledge that *to him belonged shame and confusion of face e.* And in just the same temper shall we find the apostles and disciples of Jesus: Peter crying out with an astonishment, the genuine fruit of his humiliation and abasement of heart, *Depart from me, O Lord, for I am a sinful man f;* and the great apostle, amidst all his attainments, both natural and spiritual, confessing himself the very *chief of sinners g,* and freely acknowledging, *By the grace of God I am what I am h.* In short, this feature I have been describing, is strongly expressed in every religious character the Scriptures have given us; and fixes an exact resemblance between all the men of God, whose histories are there recorded. Patriarchs, prophets, and apostles, all unite in loudly adoring the grace of God, and humbly deploring their own unworthiness; in freely renouncing every pretence of merit on their part, and cheerfully ascribing their salvation to the divine mercy alone.

And such is the temper of good men of every country, of every age, and of every rank and condition. Princes, who fear God, we shall see smiting upon their breasts, and with the same lowliness of mind as the meanest publican, crying out, *God be merciful to me a sinner i.* Neither wit, nor learning, nor honour, nor wealth, nor any other temporal emolument,

a Gen. xxviii. 17. *b* Gen. xxxii. 10. *c* Job xlii. 5, 6.
d Isa. vi. 5. *e* Dan. ix. 7. *f* Luke v. 8.
g 1 Tim. i. 15. *h* 1 Cor. xv. 10. *i* Luke xviii. 13.

should they fall to the share of the Christian, will by any means excuse him, nor does he wish they should, from these the genuine expressions of true religion. Such an exact *uniformity* is there in that divine temper, which possesses the hearts of all the people of God! Nay of their very afflictions themselves, I mean their doubts and fears, and their hours of melancholy and desertion, it may with truth be affirmed, that as they are all or much the same kind, so they are all adapted to this, the same end, to humble and abase their hearts before God, and to promote their reverence for the divine majesty and glory. This similarity is likewise farther remarkable,

2. In regard of their *hopes* and *joys*; not indeed as to the degree of them, but their nature and tendency. The grand objects of them are the same, such as the pardon of sin, the favour of God, the presence and blessing of his Spirit, the guidance and protection of his providence, deliverance from sin with all its wretched consequences, and the perfect fruition of endless happiness in the world above. The source whence they are derived is the same, even the mercy and grace of God through the Lord Jesus Christ. The means by which they are communicated are also the same, the word of God, and the other appointments of religion, such as meditation, prayer and an attendance on public worship. So likewise the influence by which they are excited is the same, the seasonable and gracious operation of the Holy Spirit. And after much the same manner do they take their rise in the heart, usually following upon a deep and humbling sense of their own unworthiness, accompanied perhaps with many doubts and fears, and with many debates and questionings as to their state before God. Thus divine wisdom and grace pursues the same measures with them all, first wounds and then heals, first humbles and then exalts. And in like manner, these hopes and joys are every where similar in their nature and tendency. They refresh the hearts, and strengthen the hands of all who enjoy them.

Now, whoever these happy persons are, whether distinguished by the honours and pleasures, or by the disappointments and sorrows of the present life, it is equally true of them all, that

they place a higher value on these divine and heavenly blessings than any other. The good man who is elevated to the very pinnacle of worldly grandeur, if such an one there be, considers the favour of his God as an acquisition infinitely more resplendent and dignifying than all the envied pomp he possesses. And the good man, on the other hand, who is reduced to outward circumstances the most abject and distressing, covets these emoluments of a spiritual kind, far beyond all the ease and affluence of a temporal nature, which Providence hath thought fit to deny him. *Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee a,* was the language of a prophet who held no inconsiderable rank in the church of God, when its outward condition was prosperous and flourishing. And it was the prayer of a great and mighty prince, who had shared largely of the honours of victory, and the gratifications of popular applause, *Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon me b.* Nay, in latter times, an apostle who had been bred at the feet of Gamaliel, and could boast perhaps of superior advantages of genius, learning and reputation, to most others, solemnly declares, that he *counted all these things but loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of Jesus Christ his Lord, and as no better than dung,* when compared with the exalted honour and privilege of an interest in his favour and love *c.*

Thus uniformly do all good men agree in their judgment, as to the refined and satisfying nature of religious pleasures, and thus eagerly do they all thirst after the enjoyment of them; ever cheerful and happy whilst they are in the possession of them, and ever gloomy and disconsolate whilst they are interdicted or withheld. Thus have they all the same refined and exalted taste, and thus are they all, in their measure, alike benefited by the gratifications of it; it being the universal and genuine effect of these joys to moderate the affections to the world, to elevate the mind to God, to make the heart courageous in its opposition to sin, and to inspire the whole soul with gratitude and praise. Surely then, it may be truly said, that *they have all drank into the same spirit.*

And were I here to recite at large the experiences of all the

a Psal. lxxiii. 25. *b* Psal. iv. 6. *c* Phil. iii. 8.

people of God recorded in the Bible, those of ancient and of later times, those of distinguished and of inferior abilities, those who enjoyed the honours and emoluments of the Jewish dispensation, and those who endured the disgrace and persecution that attended the introduction of the Christian; were I to present to your view, an Abraham, a Moses and a David, amidst their wealth, power and wisdom, and a Peter, James and John, amidst their poverty, weakness and simplicity; you would find them all giving the same account of the hopes and joys of religion, and all joining issue in this testimony concerning them, that *the ways of Wisdom are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths peace a.* And from hence it is natural farther to observe,

3. That there must be the like uniformity, in respect of *the pure and spiritual tendency* it gives to the desires and affections. If there be such a thing as religion, it is evident to a demonstration, that it can have nothing short of our restoration to the divine likeness for its main object. Since then it is sin which alienates us from God, destroys our peace, lays waste our joys, disgraces our natures, and brings ruin on our souls; this antidote which divine grace hath provided against it, must take effect by gradually expelling the deadly poison from the heart, and so restoring the immortal spirit to a vigorous and healthful state. Nor yet is this malignant disease at once cured: the process is gradual, and it may be painful; but there can be no reasonable doubt that in the issue it will be effectual. In the mean while, however, it is natural to expect, not only the most perfect simplicity in the remedy itself, but likewise an exact similarity in the manner of its operation on every heart, to which by the grace of God it is communicated. Nor is it to be questioned, could we have access to the minds of good men, so as to know distinctly what passes there, but we should find this to be the case.

Large hath been the number of truly pious men who have existed on this earth, though small in comparison with those of the contrary character. But their experiences being laid open to our view, we should at once discern an exact correspondence in the principal characters and leading expressions of

a Prov. iii. 17.

them all; in the fears, complaints and conflicts of their breasts, and in the tendencies, desires and resolutions of their hearts. How should we find them all, as one man, struggling for the mastery over this and the other corruption, such as pride, envy, passion, impatience, sensuality, love of the world, and the like! How should we see them all in the bitterness of their spirits bewailing the frowardness of their foolish hearts, and with deep contrition lamenting every little advantage, which sin may at any time have gained against them! And how should we hear them all, as with one voice, though perhaps interrupted with many broken sighs, pouring out their fervent prayers at the feet of Divine mercy, to be delivered from the dominion of their lusts, and to be formed for the refined and spiritual exercises of the heavenly world!

It hath often with great truth been observed, that real Christians do in nothing so exactly agree as in their prayers; I mean not in the fervency only, but in the general drift and tenor of them. Though they may differ in their apprehensions about some lesser matters, or may through various causes misunderstand each other's explanation of them; yet, when they present their addresses to God their common Father, they all talk one plain, simple and intelligible language. And the reason may be very readily assigned. Prayer is no other than the offering our desires to God: it being then the grand object of every good man's desire to resemble God, a wish which includes in it every spiritual and heavenly blessing, it follows of consequence that there must be an *uniformity* in their prayers. This clearly shews therefore the perfect agreement there is among them all, in that great and essential branch of true religion, which we are treating of under this particular.

And were it necessary, we might here, as well as in the former instances, cite the numerous testimonies of sacred writ in confirmation of this pleasing truth: for the examples of the Bible, in all the artless and undisguised forms in which they are drawn out to our view, do no less recommend purity of heart and life, than do its doctrines and precepts. But it will be sufficient to appeal to the sensations of every serious Christian, and to the acknowledgments of even those, who pretend not themselves to that sacred character. Let all then who are in

earnest about religion say, whether on the one hand remains of indwelling sin, that is, in other words, the irregular tendencies of the heart, are not the principal burden they groan under; and whether on the other hand, the prospect of being wholly freed from these sad complaints, and so being assimilated into the spiritual likeness of God, is not the most pleasant cordial which can be administered unto their spirits? To this question they will instantly reply in the affirmative; and I may add, will express themselves with a vehemence and cheerfulness on this point, which will shew them all to be as it were one soul. And as to those who have no real sense of religion upon their hearts, we shall find even their apprehensions of it, however confined and mistaken in other respects, including in them the general ideas of holiness and goodness. Such they take to be the meaning of religion, or they could not with any appearance of reason ridicule those, who, while they pretend to it, are wholly destitute of either of these qualities. So that we have the consent both of good and bad men upon this argument, that if there be such a thing as religion, its tendency to promote holiness must be uniformly the same in all who profess it. And from hence the transition is very natural,

4. To that spirit of real charity and friendship, which is the genuine fruit of evangelical purity. That love must needs enter deeply into the very principles and genius of religion, is methinks sufficiently evident from the nature of God, the great object of it—*God is love a;* from the unparalleled love of the blessed Jesus, the grand medium of it—*it passeth knowledge b;* and from the indispensable importance of it to our happiness and usefulness—*it is the bond of perfection c, the fulfilling of the law d,* the chief attainment of the divine life, and that which reflects the most pleasing lustre on all the other graces and duties of it. Love softens the heart, meliorates the affections, begets peace and union in the mind, and diffuses joy and pleasure through it. Love is the main spring of acceptable obedience: it unites us to God, and so conciliates our will to his; it unites us to one another, and so inclines us to acts of generosity and goodness. It inspires us with benevolent dispositions towards

a 1 John iv. 16. *b* Eph. iii. 19. *c* Col. iii. 14. *d* Rom. xiii. 10.

mankind in general, with a tender sympathy towards the distressed, and with a cordial esteem for all good men.

Now this being the case, no man can become a *new creature* without partaking of this divine temper. It is interwoven with his very nature, and is a feature so fully expressed in the countenance of every branch of this numerous family, that we are warranted to put the trial of our new birth on this issue. Where is the man of religion who is not a lover of God? who does not admire his transcendent excellencies, as displayed in the various works of his hands? who does not feel a grateful sense of the rich profusion of goodness he is continually pouring upon him? and who does not consider him as his chief portion, and the only source of his most substantial felicity? Where is the pious soul who is not a lover of the adorable Jesus? who does not reverence him, as the most amiable of all objects, while by faith he contemplates the unspeakable glories of his divinity, shining through the veil of his humanity? and who does not feel a pure flame of heavenly affection kindled in his breast towards him, while he dwells on the matchless wonders of that grace he hath displayed, in yielding his life to death for the most unworthy? And where, in one word, is the good man, who is not a lover of good men, whose heart is not susceptible of lively impressions, from a contemplation of the divine image on whatever mind he sees it drawn; and who is not, by this pleasing band of friendship and love, firmly attached to his Christian brother, however despicable he may be in other respects?

Love then, pure, spiritual, heavenly love, is an essential property of real religion, necessary to form the character of every good man, and of consequence an endowment common to all the children of God. This was the temper of the antediluvian saints, of those who flourished under the Jewish dispensation, and of those who sprung into existence amidst the more bright discoveries of the gospel; the temper of Noah, of David, and of John. It was love that tuned the harp of the sweet singer of Israel, and love that guided the pen of the beloved disciple of Christ. How does this divine passion towards the blessed God, and all who bear his image, diffuse itself through the devout psalms of the one, and the affectionate epistles of the other! What shall I say? not a Christian breathes, whose heart is un-

touched with this hallowed fire which comes down from heaven. It communicates itself to every living temple, which the divine Spirit hath consecrated for his residence; and though, through various causes, the warmth and ardour of it may sometimes abate, it shall not, it cannot be totally extinguished. O happy world, where it shall never any more languish; but, rising into one bright and pure flame, shall shed light and heat far and wide, and dissolve every heart into gratitude and praise!

Thus have we seen what are the principal expressions of real religion, wherein good men, however they may be circumstanced in other respects, are universally agreed. *They have been all made to drink into one spirit.* The grace of God first *humbles and abases the heart* of man; then *possesses it of divine hopes and joys*; hereby *new-models and refines its* prevailing *tendencies and desires*; and so *makes it capable of* what is the perfection of religion, even *pure love and exalted friendship.*

PART III.

HAVING described the several leading expressions of religion, which form an exact *similarity* in the characters of all the people of God, I am now,

III. In a few words to point out the *grounds* or *reasons* of this uniformity, which will serve at once both to confirm the observation in the text, and still further to elucidate and explain it. And here, amidst the many considerations that might be offered, we shall confine ourselves to those only which are so plain and simple, that they must needs be obvious at first view to every truly serious mind. As first, that the *subjects* of religion are all of the same nature. Secondly, that they all derive this divine blessing from the same *origin.* And thirdly, that it is uniformly adapted to the same great and important *ends.*

1. They are all of *the same nature.* Were they indeed each a different species of creatures, formed after a different manner, and upon a different foundation as to their acceptance with God; it would follow that there would be a diversity in some of the main expressions of their religion. Faculties essentially varying from each other, would require a various kind of treatment, and he who had preserved his innocence and perfection as in the

beginning, would not need that repentance and renovation of heart, which are necessary to the recovery of a guilty and depraved creature. But this is not the case here. We are all made of one blood, all endowed with the like faculties, all possessed of the same passions, and all the unhappy partakers of the same depraved nature. It is acknowledged, indeed, that there is a strength of genius, and a softness of natural temper in some, which renders them more amiable than others; yet the principal outlines of human apostacy are much the same in all.

From hence therefore it is easy to see, that in respect of the grand concerns of religion, the perceptions and reasonings of every enlightened mind, and the sensations and feelings of every renewed heart, must be very nearly similar. The guilty must be humbled, and made truly penitent; the condemned must be justified, and so become, in a degree at least, cheerful and happy; the depraved must be renewed, and as to their prevailing disposition made holy; and they who are at variance with God and one another, must be made capable of divine love and friendship. The former, therefore, having been the true state of every good man, the latter must of consequence be the sum and substance of the religion of each one of them. And since, in every subject of the grace of God, there are thus the same materials to be wrought upon, the same passions and prejudices to be overcome, and the same change to be effected; it follows, likewise, that this great concern, in its rise, progress, and final consummation, must be conducted in every heart after much the same manner. All which I think fully accounts for that similarity of experience in good men, which hath been so particularly delineated. This inference is likewise, with the same force of reason, to be drawn from a contemplation,

2. Of the one grand *source* or *origin* whence religion is derived. It is *from above*, the offspring of God, and the genuine fruit of the influence and operation of his Spirit. From this one fountain the water of life flows; and how various soever the channels may be through which it runs, the many pure and pleasant streams of it may all be traced back to this their common head. What is affirmed in this context, of the miraculous gifts peculiar to the primitive church, may, with the like reason, be applied to the better blessings of religion, or of the grace of

God, that *the same Spirit divideth to every man severally as he will a.* It is he who irradiates the dark mind, comforts the afflicted heart, new models the perverse will, and sanctifies the polluted affections.

Now, as *no fountain can send forth at the same place, sweet water and bitter b;* so we may be very sure, that what is the effect of a divine influence on the souls of men, must be of the same pure and spiritual nature and tendency. And for the like reason we may safely conclude in the general, that however the circumstances of particular persons may in some respects differ, yet the manner of the divine operation on the hearts of men is much the same. Religion will begin then in our humiliation, and advance through various degrees of sanctification, till it rises to a perfection of happiness and glory in the heavenly world. To all which I shall only add,

3. That the great and important *ends* which religion proposes, clearly evince the simplicity and uniformity of it. The glory of God, our own happiness, and the welfare of society, are acknowledged to be the principal objects of this great concern. And if we take our estimate of it by these measures, as we shall hereby be secured from any very gross and absurd apprehensions about it; so we shall be obliged to join issue with the text, in the testimony it gives concerning its *sameness.* The lines from the circumference to the centre, having an immediate direction to that point, must advance towards it in the same manner, and be exactly similar to each other. In like manner, there is not one of the particulars in which we have made religion to consist, but will be found on reflection to have the great objects just mentioned immediately in view; nay, if either of them be excluded, our idea of religion must be imperfect, if not the grand ends of it absolutely defeated. Can the true God be glorified, or his perfections be held in due veneration by him, who in effect exalts himself into a deity, and impiously offers sacrifice to his own merit and sufficiency? Can a man be rationally cheerful and substantially happy, while he stands exposed to the wrath of God, and remains a wretched slave to his lusts? Or can the prosperity of particular communities, and the welfare of society in general, be maintained and promoted, while the

a 1 Cor. xii. 11. b James iii. 11.

turbulent passions of depraved nature are unrestrained and unsubdued? But, on the other hand, how amiable an appearance does true religion make, when unaffected humility, divine hope, pure desire, and fervent love, form the chief expressions of it! These are graces which manifestly tend to exalt the glory of God, and promote the happiness of men. And since there is, apparently such an unity of design in this great concern, it necessarily follows, that if we are the children of God, and the disciples of Jesus, *we have been all made to drink into one spirit.*

Having thus illustrated and confirmed the argument in the text, we shall close what hath been said, with briefly applying it to the uses mentioned in the beginning of this discourse. And,

1. It fully obviates a very popular, and indeed a very plausible objection to the truth of religion. "There are so many different notions and professions in the world, says the man of infidelity, that it is no easy matter to determine which is right. The natural inference therefore from this variety of sentiment is, that all religions are doubtful and defective of that degree of evidence which is necessary to satisfy an inquisitive mind." But the light in which this matter hath been placed, clearly shews the objection to be fallacious, and the conclusion most irrational and absurd.

That men do reason very differently, and that too upon the essential points of divine revelation, is acknowledged; and that many do make religion to consist in what does not really belong to it, and profess themselves to be what they are not, is likewise as certain. But it does not follow from these abuses of religion, that it is itself a vague, loose and uncertain thing. There is but one way to heaven, and however the apprehensions of good men themselves as to some lesser things, may not be alike clear, and their external forms of profession may in many respects differ; yet the leading principles of their judgment, and the main feelings and experiences of their hearts, are strictly analogous and similar. And we may venture to appeal to every one, who hath entered into the spirit of these great and important matters, for the truth of what we have affirmed. Be not shocked therefore at the different appearances religion may assume. They are easily to be accounted for, upon this

plain and acknowledged principle, that at present *we know in part, and prophesy in part*, and that the best of us are subject to prejudices, which through various causes are almost unconquerable. Religion is however but *one thing*; and if you are so happy as really to know and feel what it is, you will have the testimony of all good men, of every age, kindred, nation and tongue, to join you in your humble and cheerful profession of it. This argument also,

2. Furnishes a powerful motive to the cultivation of intimate union and cordial affection, among all the people of God. Is religion *one thing?* Then they who are partakers of this one common blessing, should also be the partakers of each other's esteem and love. I mean not from hence to infer the least indifference to any divine truth, which proposes itself to the faith of a Christian. As truth can be but one, so no discovery which infinite wisdom and goodness have thought fit to make, is by any means to be considered as indifferent in itself, and of little or no use. Thus to treat any of the sacred doctrines or institutions of the Bible, is, in proportion to their importance, to sap the very foundation of that love and union we wish to recommend. That integrity which arises out of the nature of religion, demands a firm and unshaken attachment to whatever appears to be of divine authority. And that pure concern which it excites in the breast, for the glory of God, and the good of mankind, not only excuses but warrants a becoming zeal in the defence of the truth.

But surely, as we ought all to *contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints*; so we are obliged by the simplicity and sameness of that divine spirit and temper, which hath been infused into our hearts, *most sincerely and affectionately to love one another*. If the laws of humanity constrain us to express a tender regard toward mankind in general, purely upon this principle that they partake of the same nature with ourselves; the argument must receive additional strength, when it comes clothed with all the native dignity and generosity which religion gives it, at the same time presenting to our view the good man who is born from above, as the object of this our esteem and affection. Can we believe him to be the offspring of God, the brother of Jesus, and a partaker of the same nature with

ourselves, and not embrace him with the utmost cordiality in the arms of Christian charity? God forbid that we should be insensible to such divine impressions! *Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and every one that loveth, is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not, knoweth not God; for God is love a.* May this temper live and increase in each of our hearts, so proving us to be the disciples of Jesus; till at length it shall arrive at its utmost perfection, in the realms of light and glory above!

DISCOURSE IV.

THE IMPORTANCE OF RELIGION.

LUKE x. 42.——*One thing is needful.*——

THAT religion is a concern of infinite *importance* to mankind, every one will acknowledge who admits that there really is such a thing. And yet, alas! there are few only who have a deep operative, abiding sense of this impressed upon their hearts. To excite therefore your attention to this one grand concern, and by the grace of God, to persuade you to a vigorous and persevering pursuit of it is the object of this discourse. Nor can, methinks, any one among us turn a deaf ear to this argument, while he duly reflects, that it is not only the most interesting which was ever proposed to his attention, but that it stands thus distinguished in our text, by the decisive sentence of the Son of God himself.

What led our Saviour to discourse on this subject, is particularly mentioned in the preceding verses. Entering it seems into a certain village, he was invited to the house of a woman named Martha, who had a sister called Mary. This village, it is highly probable, was Bethany, a place not far from Jerusalem; and these two women, the same of whom the Evangelist

a 1 John iv. 7, 8.

John speaks *a*, and whose brother Lazarus had been raised from the dead. They appear both of them to have been the friends of Jesus, and of religion; though, in the course of the story, the preference, in regard of piety, is manifestly given to Mary above Martha.

As to Mary, she *sat at the feet of Jesus, and heard his word b.* Her attention was almost wholly taken up with the things of God; so that she gladly embraced every opportunity of hearing our Saviour's doctrine, and profiting by his instructions. But as to Martha, she *was cumbered about much serving c.* Indeed her much serving was the effect of her hospitality, and an expression of her love to Christ, and was therefore, in these views of it, highly commendable. But her active and impetuous temper had hurried her into too great anxiety about worldly things, and so was likely to prove hurtful to her best interests. Yea, one ill effect of it remarkably appeared, in the indecent fretfulness she betrayed on the present occasion. For, in the midst of her busy care to provide for our Saviour's entertainment, observing her sister wholly taken up with his company and conversation, she petulantly complains of her inattention to the affairs of the family, and prays that she might be dismissed to assist her therein. To which our Lord immediately makes answer in the verse preceding the text: *Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things.* "The anxiety you express upon this occasion is unbecoming and sinful. How fond soever you may be of shewing me respect, yet there is a mixture of vanity with your hospitality, and of worldly mindedness with your care and industry. You are too busy about these matters. The affairs of your family, though they ought to be prudently attended to, yet should not shut out the grand concern of God and religion. This is *the one thing needful.* Be persuaded therefore to transfer your needless anxieties, from these many trifling matters, to that which is of indispensable importance. *There is a necessity of one thing d.* And instead of censuring your sister Mary as if she were too religious, rather consider her conduct as a proper pattern for your imitation; for she *hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her.*"

a John xi. *b* Luke x. 39. *c* Ver. 40. *d* Ἑνὸς δέ ἐστι χρεία.

And now, methinks, little pains need be taken to prove, that this reproof of our Saviour's is of more general use than in the particular instance before us, and that he himself so designed it. Dismissing therefore any farther concern with Martha, let us consider this most important and salutary admonition as addressed immediately to ourselves. There is a strong propensity in each of us to an undue solicitude about the affairs of the present life. But what says Christ to us amidst all our vain pursuits?—"Be not careful and troubled about these many things. There is need of one thing only: let that therefore be the main object of your attention."

If it be asked what this one thing is? the answer is ready, It is *religion*, or a principle of divine life implanted in the heart by the grace of God; the main expressions of which are, faith in Christ, and repentance towards God. By the prophets it is usually styled, *the fear of the Lord a*, and *a new heart b*; and by the apostles, *the new creature c*, *the incorruptible seed d*, and *the wisdom that is from above e*. It includes in it an interest in the mediation of Christ and all the blessings of salvation, as its privilege; and the right government of the temper and life, as its duty. My present design is not to enter into a particular explanation of the nature of religion, that having been attempted already; but to confine myself entirely to the *importance* of it. It is of all things most necessary, and that without which, we cannot fail of being exposed to the utmost misery and danger. In order therefore to set this argument in the strongest light, we shall,

I. Compare *the one thing needful* with the many other things of the present life, about which we are apt to be careful and troubled.

II. Shew more directly wherein the *Importance* of it consists; and then,

III. Confirm this view of it by some plain reflections on the nature of religion, as it hath been already in general explained.

If we compare serious religion with the most important and interesting concerns of human life, it will clearly appear to have the precedence of them all. *Knowledge*, *reputation*, *friendship*,

a Jer. xxxii. 40, &c. *b* Ezek. xviii. 31. *c* 2 Cor. v. 17.—Gal. vi. 15.
d 1 John iii. 9.—1 Pet. i. 23. *e* Jam. iii. 17.

subsistence and *health*, will I imagine include in them every thing, which mankind hath been used to account needful.

1. *Knowledge* we will mention first, as it is what men in general deem the least necessary, though it be an excellent accomplishment, and in some respects superior to any of the blessings just mentioned. An acquaintance with human nature, with the history of the world, with the various interests of mankind, and with the connections and dependencies of all things around us, is a very desirable attainment. Nor is the utility of it inconsiderable, since it not only affords a rational pleasure to the mind, but is of great importance to direct our conduct in most of the affairs of life. So that we are highly indebted to those who, at the expence of much time and unwearied labour, have generously contributed to the interests of learning and knowledge.

But notwithstanding this, human science, whatever be the benefits resulting from it, cannot be styled, *the one thing needful*; no, not absolutely so, even in regard of our well-being in the present life. A man may be wholly rude and uncultivated as to any accomplishment of this sort, and yet be both a good and a happy man, an useful member of society, and a joyful expectant of future felicity and glory. Not a few instances of this sort we have frequently before our eyes. Nay it is possible, and it too often happens, that persons of distinguished abilities, and of extraordinary attainments in respect of these things, may be destitute, not only of the grace of God, but of a common principle of honesty; and so be rather the enemies than the friends of mankind, the pests rather than the ornaments of society, and instruments of the greatest evil, rather than of any good to their fellow creatures. *Human knowledge* therefore, however useful, is not so necessary but it may be dispensed with, especially when laid in the balance with the grand concerns of religion. Whatever rational pleasure it may afford the mind, it will not give peace to the conscience. However it may direct our conduct in the civil affairs of life, it will not guide our feet to heaven. And though it may secure us from many temporary evils and inconveniences, it will not effectually give us the conquest over ourselves, and make us meet for a better world.

2. *Reputation* is a desirable blessing; and when considered

in reference to probity and virtue, is certainly of far greater importance to our happiness, even in the present life, than the most considerable improvements in human science. It is natural for men to wish to please. A generous mind feels a satisfaction in being approved by the wise and good. But this passion, carried beyond its due bounds, hurries men into an immoderate and sinful pursuit of honour and applause; and that often upon the footing, not of real, but of supposed merit. To be elevated above the common level of mankind, and to be deemed great, prudent, and honourable by the men of the world, this too many account their chief happiness, and eagerly grasp at, as *the one thing needful.*

But, alas! how sad the deception! What vain shadows, what empty bubbles, are all the honours of this transitory world! They will not satisfy an immortal mind; nor will they always add ease and security to our outward circumstances. So far from it, that they frequently prove the occasions of many anxious cares, and restless disappointments. Yea, even the just respect and esteem of his fellow-creatures, is not essentially necessary to a man's real felicity; nor will it certainly secure him from the many other evils of human life, to which he stands exposed in common with the rest of mankind. And however a *good name*, or a character for sobriety and integrity is *better than precious ointment*, and far more fragrant to a virtuous mind than the sweetest perfumes to the senses: yet it is not *the one thing needful.* This invaluable blessing a man may fully possess, and yet on many accounts be extremely unhappy. And though, on the other hand, it be invidiously and cruelly denied him, yet he may enjoy the most agreeable peace and composure within. But if neither *knowledge* nor *reputation* come within this description; may it not be applied,

3. To *friendship?* I had almost said, Yes: For so inestimable is the blessing, that it is hardly possible to exceed in the commendation of it. It is one of the chief felicities of the present life. We were made for society. We could not live without it. The happiness of heaven consists in the perfection of it. Friendship is a firm barrier against many of the evils and dangers of life; a reviving cordial to the heart amidst most of the sorrows and afflictions of it; and that fruit of heavenly

growth, which adds a rich flavour to all our other enjoyments. The advantages of counsel and reproof, of assistance and sympathy, which arise out of it, cannot fail of endearing it to every thoughtful and prudent mind. He, therefore, who hath a wise, affectionate and faithful friend, may be justly deemed the favourite of Providence: and though he ranks with the lowest class of mankind, yet (so rarely is true friendship to be found) he stands distinguished, in point of happiness, above many who shine in all the pomp and splendour of human greatness.

But after all, this is not the *one thing needful*—not so needful as to be of the highest moment. Our friends, however dear to us, may deceive or forsake us, or by death be forced from our embraces. Some amidst a swarm of friends have been miserable. Yea, it is often beyond the power of friendship to succour and relieve us in outward extremity; and much more so to speak peace and joy effectually to our hearts, when bowed down with religious grief and melancholy. Whereas, on the other hand, there have been those, who, though deprived of all agreeable connections on earth, yet have enjoyed the most peaceful security, and the most enlivening pleasures, under the shadow of his wings who is friendship itself. This blessing, then, excellent and desirable as it is, is not *the one thing needful*. However,

4. Most are agreed in thus representing a man's *subsistence*, maintenance, or livelihood. Hence food and raiment are usually styled *the necessaries of life*. And such they certainly are: we cannot live, we cannot subsist without them. A thousand other things might be dispensed with as superfluities, or to say the best of them, the agreeable accommodations of the present state. But these are strictly speaking needful: and our Saviour himself admits that they are so, when, discoursing to his disciples of these matters, he tells them, *Your heavenly Father knoweth that you have need of them a.* A care, therefore to provide a comfortable support for ourselves and our families, is not only allowable, but our incumbent duty. Yea, so far is religion from countenancing sloth, under the pretext of indifference about worldly affairs, that it assures us, the man of this character *hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel b.*

a Matt. vi. 32. b 1 Tim. v. 8.

Nevertheless the importance of these things is only comparative, and they take their denomination as needful, merely from their reference to our existence in the present world. They are necessary, as animal life cannot ordinarily be maintained and upheld without them: but they are not necessary to the existence and well-being of our souls, or to our future and everlasting felicity. We may be poor, destitute and miserable, in regard of our outward circumstances, and yet possess the best riches. Our bodies may be clothed in rags, and yet our souls arrayed in heavenly attire. Our natures may faint and die away for want of common sustenance, and yet our immortal spirits be fed with living bread. Lazarus was denied, not only the dainties of the rich man's table, but the crumbs that fell from it; yet Lazarus possessed *the one thing needful*. And the same may be said,

5. And lastly, as to *health*. This every one will acknowledge an important blessing,—so important, that no other enjoyment of life can be properly relished without it. What are all the profits, honours, and pleasures of the world, to a man languishing of a mortal disease, worn out by racking pains, or pining away with loathing sickness? he is absolutely incapacitated for the pursuits of life, and totally indisposed to them. Wisdom and knowledge, reputation and friendship, avail him little; yea, food itself, the most needful thing in life, however elegantly served up, is nauseous to his taste. Health, therefore, cannot but claim the preference to every other outward good.

Yet even this is not *the one thing needful*, in the sense of our text. The health of the soul is of infinitely greater moment than that of the body. This must die, but that must live for ever. And how sad to see the one arrayed in all the bloom and verdure of youth, exulting in the possession of ease, vigour, and strength; while the other is deformed, enervated and ruined by sin, growing up to death and destruction, and ripening for everlasting vengeance and misery! And, on the other hand, how pleasing to congratulate the Christian, as the apostle John did Gaius *a*, on the health and prosperity of his soul; while his outward frame, amidst the increasing languors of age or sickness, is making speedy advances towards its final dissolution!

a 3 John 2.

Thus, neither *knowledge*, nor *reputation*, nor *friendship*, nor *subsistence*, nor *health*, however excellent, useful, or important in themselves, are of like moment with the great and inestimable blessing of real religion. This demands the precedence of them all, and is, in the estimation of wisdom itself, *the one thing needful*. From this comparative view of it, let us then proceed,

II. To inquire more directly wherein the *importance* of it doth consist.

Now that surely will be deemed most important, which enters into the essence of our happiness, which takes in the whole compass of our interests both natural and spiritual, which hath respect both to body and soul, and which extends its influence through time into eternity. And such is the nature of religion. O that men did but believe it! O that by the grace of God they were persuaded to make trial of it! Here then we might take a view of the many advantages which attend the experience and practice of religion in the present life, and in that which is to come; and shew how admirably it is adapted to promote the real interests of persons of every age, in every relation, and in every condition.

I might discourse of its utility to *the young*; to check the violence of their passions, to restrain their inordinate desires, to regulate their aims and pursuits, to fortify them against the snares of life, to animate them to the duties of it, to infuse a sweetness into the enjoyments of it, and to add a real beauty to their character and deportment in the view of all.—I might represent the importance of it to *persons of riper years*; to qualify them for the various services to which Providence calls them, to direct them in emergencies of the most critical and trying nature, to hold them steady to their best interests in seasons of imminent temptation and danger, and to render them both respectable and useful in their day and generation.—And hence I might go on to a description of the many blessings it pours upon *the hoary head*; what cheerfulness it spreads over the countenance, when the vigour and sprightliness of youth abates; what firm support it yields the heart, when the animal spirits are almost dissolved and broken by the infirmities of nature; and what weight it adds to the instructions and counsels

then given, when the capacity and judgment of former years are in other respects greatly on the decline.

I might farther enlarge on the importance of it to *persons in every relation of life*; to magistrates and to subjects, to masters and to servants, to parents and to children, to brethren, to friends, and to neighbours: how needful to teach men their duty, to animate them to it, and to assist them in it.

From hence I might go on to represent the advantages resulting from it to *persons in every condition*: in prosperity, when the world smiles upon them, and they have an affluence of all outward good; to secure their hearts from an immoderate fondness for present enjoyments, to inspire their breasts with thankfulness, and to dispose them to usefulness; and in adversity, when providence frowns on them, and they are encompassed on every side with perplexity, sorrow and trouble, to reconcile them to the will of God, to alleviate their affliction, and to render it subservient to their real advantage.

In like manner, I might proceed to shew you how needful true religion is *in a time of sickness and death*, when all the scenes of life are passing away from before our eyes, when the king of terrors is nearly approaching, and when eternity with all its awful realities is immediately in our view; how needful it is then to banish fear from our hearts, to reconcile us to that most certain event, and to diffuse serenity and joy through our minds, when nature itself is dissolving and dying away.

In a word, to finish the scene, I might represent to you the never-fading honours, and immortal pleasures of the heavenly world; the large and fair inheritance there provided for the sons of God, the crowns of glory which shall be placed on their heads, the palms of victory which shall be put into their hands, the robes of joy and gladness they shall wear, and the rest, the happiness, and renown they shall possess to all eternity. But, however instructive and animating these subjects are, I forbear at present to enlarge any farther upon them.

PART II.

My design is now to evince the *Importance* of real religion, from a contemplation of the misery and danger to which the want of it necessarily exposes us. And if it can be made ap-

pear, that without it we lie open to the greatest evils in life—to the utmost anguish in death—and to the wrath of God in the world to come; it will, it must be acknowledged, that it is *the one thing needful*. Here then we will,

First, Take a survey of the unhappy condition of a man void of religion in *the present life*. To this end let us view him on the one hand triumphing in *prosperity*, and on the other laden with *adversity*: events these which are alike common both to the good and to the bad. And since it is from them we usually take our measures of human happiness or misery, a consideration of his behaviour, in both these circumstances, will give us the most striking idea of the necessity and importance of true religion.

1. Let *prosperity* then, first of all, be the dress we view him in. His worldly schemes succeed to his wishes. He grows great, rich and honourable. He hath large treasures, wide extended possessions, numerous friends and dependents, and an affluence of all outward good. His wealth entitles him, not to power and dignity only, but to all the delights and gratifications of sense. He flourisheth *like a green bay tree, his eyes stand out with fatness*, and *he hath more than heart can wish a*. And now will you say that this man is happy, that his wealth secures him from danger, and that, being thus exalted to the pinnacle of honour and pleasure, he is beyond the reach of misery? O no! Being at enmity with God and religion, his blessings become curses to him; his prosperity makes him only a broader mark for temptation, and so in the end capable of the greater misery.

Turn your eye from all this glare of external pomp and gaiety to his heart, and you will find him rather an object of pity than of envy. There reign the depraved passions of human nature invested with sovereign power, and confirmed therein by every accession of worldly good. He is full, and takes the name of God in vain. He hath every thing, and yet truly enjoys nothing. He abounds, and yet is not content. To his lusts he yields, and yet his lusts are not satisfied. His riches make him poor, because they only increase his desires. His pleasures cease to be pleasures, through satiety and want of va-

a Psal. xxxvii. 35, lxxiii. 7.

riety. The passions of pride, jealousy, discontent, and desire, are all irritated and inflamed by his successes. New temptations lead him captive into new sins. Guilt accumulates on his conscience. His dislike of every thing that is serious increases. He would fain persuade himself to be an infidel. The evil day he puts afar off. God he hates—the world he loves—death he fears—and his own soul he destroys for ever.

Is not then the condition of this man, amidst all his boasted enjoyments, very deplorable? Possessing more than the necessaries of life, even its joys and pleasures, he is miserable. And why? because he has not *the one thing needful*, lives without God in the world, and is a slave to sin and sense. If this be the case, and let experience and observation decide the point, of what infinite *importance* is religion! How needful this one thing to enable us to enjoy life, and to prevent our being ruined by it! to moderate our affections to the world, and so secure us from falling a sacrifice to it! to keep us in the day of temptation, and to make us more than conquerors, when all the powers of earth and hell threaten our destruction!

Having thus beheld the man of this world arrayed in all the gaiety and splendour of outward prosperity; let us now reverse the scene, and view him plunged in the depths,

2. Of *adversity*; for adversity is sometimes the lot of bad as well as good men. We will suppose him, then, stript of the profits, honours, and pleasures of life, entangled with the difficulties and disappointments of it, reduced to poverty and want, laden with disgrace and contempt, languishing of the pains and weaknesses of declining nature, and to complete the scene, treated with coldness and neglect by his best friends, and utterly forsaken and abandoned by the rest. To all these calamities, or at least to one or other of them, we will, I say, suppose him subjected. Now in these circumstances, how does he behave? how does he support himself? what considerations is he possessed of to calm his mind, and fortify his heart? It is possible, indeed, that firmness of animal spirits, or ambition to be thought superior to the misfortunes of life, may in some degree suppress or stifle the feelings of nature, and enable him to assume an appearance somewhat brave and steady. But being destitute of any just sense of religion, how is it possible he should enjoy that

real inward serenity, and that rational uniform patience and resolution, which the faith of God, of his providence, and a better world, inspires?

On the contrary, the fear of God being far removed from his eyes, and the hope of the gospel having no firm hold on his heart, we shall rather hear him affronting God with the most indecent reflections on his dispensations, or else just expiring under the insupportable weight of his sorrows. And in these sad circumstances, how much is the man of this world to be pitied! He has no God to fly to—no providence to confide in—no Saviour to pity him—no divine aids to assist and strengthen him—no promise of better blessings to secure him from despondency—nor the least hope of future happiness and glory to soothe his tempestuous passions, or to administer joy and gladness to his heart. Most men seem to think religion *needful* at such a time. And indeed if there were no truth in it, yet the firm persuasion of it would be extremely eligible, when in these circumstances; as it so much tends to quiet the troubled breast, and to reconcile it to events which are necessary and unavoidable. A man overwhelmed with outward trouble, and in the midst of this thick and dark tempest, without one ray of hope as to a future state, must of all men be most miserable. Such the apostles acknowledged they should have been, had they remained strangers to the animating prospects of a better world which Christianity affords.

Religion, then, is most certainly *the one thing needful*, as the want of it exposes men to the greatest danger in a time of *prosperity*, and adds infinitely to their distress in that of *adversity*. And from this view of things, we may easily judge how it may be with such persons, in every condition, circumstance, and relation of life. Their hearts not being principled with the grace of God, they can have nothing to preserve the balance in their minds; but must on every occasion be subject to a hurtful, if not painful fluctuation of the passions. They can have nothing to ward off the many dangers continually flying around them; but must lie at the mercy of every resolute temptation which assaults them. But allowing the man of this world every perquisite of happiness, which can be supposed to fall to his share, or indeed which the delights and pleasures of sense can possibly afford; yet,

SECONDLY, *He must die;* and being at enmity with religion, how deplorable must his condition be in that critical, that trying hour! It is dreadful indeed to describe to you the countenance, the expressions, the feelings of a dying sinner. Many, I am sensible there are, who pass out of life in a hardened and thoughtless manner: but the reverse is perhaps most commonly the case. And where the mind is capable of reflection and prospect, and especially where the conscience is thoroughly awake; how pungent must be the distress, how bitter the agony of the soul?

Some of us, it may be, have stood by the bed of a departing sinner, have the dreadful image still before our eyes, and the sad accents still sounding in our ears. "Every earthly scene is passing away, the bonds of nature are just dissolving, and as to this world, to which I have sacrificed my heart, my hopes, my all, I am no more. With you, my friends, my possessions, my honours, my sensual gratifications, yea, every thing that is dear to me, I must now part; part with you, never—never to enjoy you any more! And what have I before me? all is dark and gloomy. I dare not hope for heaven, for I am yet in my sins. Or if I could suppose it were possible I might possess it, yet I cannot wish for it. It is a holy place, and so perverse is this heart of mine, that though I leave what is mortal behind me, I cannot think of being happy there. O sad! as I am, thus incapable of happiness! Nay, my conscience tells me I am justly doomed to misery—an alien from God—an enemy to him—a rebel against him! His mercies I have abused, his warnings I have slighted, his grace I have affronted and despised; and now I am undone—undone for ever." What distracting, what horrible language this! *The spirit of a man* may *bear his infirmities, but a wounded spirit who can bear a? It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God b. Who knoweth the power of his anger? even as is his fear so is his wrath c.* How lamentable a sight this! a soul perishing in its sins! See! the pale countenance, the cold sweat, the faultering lips! Nature dissolves—every surrounding object vanishes, and the eyes swim in death. The curtain of humanity falls, and upon the naked, helpless soul, eternity at once pours all its tremendous

a Prov. xviii. 14. *b* Heb. x. 31. *c* Psal. xc. 11.

realities. Say then, is not religion, in these moments at least, *the one thing needful?* Surely it is. But if you still doubt the truth of what I say, ask those who, having death and eternity immediately in their view, are best capable of resolving this interesting question; and they will acknowledge, I had almost said to a man, its vast *importance.*

But the *importance* of it is chiefly to be estimated, by the reference it hath to a future state. Which leads me now,

THIRDLY, To describe to you, or at least to attempt a description of the *great loss* which he sustains who dies a stranger to God and religion, and the *infinite miseries* which are the lot of the impenitent and ungodly. Scripture assures us, that *except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God a:* and that *the wicked shall go away into everlasting punishment b.* Now by these declarations it clearly appears,

1. That he who passes out of life in an unrenewed state, is *for ever excluded the heavenly world.* A consideration this which, methinks, upon the most general view of it, reflects an amazing *importance* on religion. But how does the importance of it magnify in proportion to the clearness and brightness of our views of that blissful state! And yet, since our most exalted ideas of it are inadequate and imperfect, the greatness of the loss cannot be fully ascertained in the present life. Let us, however, for a moment attempt to follow him who was *caught up into paradise,* and there *heard* and saw *things that are unutterable c,*—to follow him thither in our meditations, that we may there learn how *needful* this one thing is, without which we can never have admission to that world, or if we could, could never enjoy it.

"Tell us then, O ye happy spirits, who are already in possession of heaven, what are your natures, what your capacities, what your pleasures, and what your employments. In heaven, that immeasureable space of light, perfection, and glory ye dwell. Your immortal spirits, refined from all the dross of ignorance, sin and sense, are exalted to the utmost pitch of vigour, purity and joy. With myriads of perfect beings, all formed for friendship and love, you for ever associate. The divine Jesus, who the other day yielded his life unto death

a John iii. 3. b Matt. xxv. 46. c 2 Cor. xii. 4.

for your sakes, deigns himself, and in your own nature, to dwell among you, to converse with you, and to lay open his heart to your view. Yea, the blessed God, arrayed in all the charms of infinite love, as well as in all the splendour of ineffable glory, condescends to reveal himself to you, and to shed on you the richest blessings of his bounty and goodness. O the pure, the substantial, the growing pleasures you enjoy, while you *behold his face in righteousness*, and feel yourselves *transformed* into his perfect *likeness!* while you contemplate his excellencies, sing his praises, and never cease to do his will! Yours is the distinguished honour to *be kings and priests unto God a*, to sit with Jesus in his throne, and to minister to him in his temple above. Yours is the exalted privilege to possess *an inheritance* which is *incorruptible, undefiled, and which fadeth not away b*, and a *far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory c*. And yours is the refined bliss *to feed* on heavenly joys, and *to drink of rivers of pleasures which run at the right hand of God for evermore.*" But I forbear———

How vain the attempt to describe the glories of that world! Our sight is too weak to sustain a vision so bright and splendid. Till therefore we arrive at heaven, we must be content with little more than being assured, that *eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor heart conceived what it is d.* Yet by this distant and confused view of it, we clearly discern that the *loss*, whoever suffers it, must be immense, since there are no human measures by which we can fully take account of it. Of what infinite moment then, is this *one thing needful!* But this is not all; *its importance* is still further heightened and increased by a view,

2. Of *the misery* to be endured, as well as the loss sustained by the impenitent and ungodly. *These shall go away*, says he who shall be judge on that great occasion, *into everlasting punishment e.* And what is that punishment? Adequate conceptions of it we cannot frame, any more than of the happiness we have been contemplating. Yet scripture presents us with such a scene, as may justly make the heart of a sinner tremble, and convince him that there is the most indispensable necessity in religion. If to be deprived of all the boasted acquisitions

a Rev. i. 6. *b* 1 Pet. i. 4. *c* 2 Cor. iv. 17.
d 1 Cor. ii. 9. *e* Matt. xxiv. 46.

and enjoyments of the present life; if to be abandoned to the rage of fierce and ungovernable passions, without feeling even the little transient pleasure which results from the gratification of them; if to endure the acute and unremitting pains of a conscience pierced and torn asunder with guilt and fear; if to be cast out of the presence of God in the character of a friend, and yet to have him ever before the eye as a justly incensed and irreconcileable enemy; if to bear the weight of his indignation, without any support under it, or any mitigation of it; and if, in one word, amidst all to have no hope of deliverance; if this be misery, such scripture assures us is the portion appointed the wicked. *To them that obey not the truth, but obey unrighteousness, even to every soul of man which doth evil, he will render indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish a.* And *they who know not God, and obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power b.*

It is an unpleasant, and I am sensible an unthankful office to lead you, sinner, down into the regions of the damned, and to shew you the mansions where dwell spirits of the like impure, fierce and diabolical passions with yourself; but the sad, the tremendous necessity of which the text speaks, obliges me. The compassionate Jesus himself, who came on the kind and generous design of saving both soul and body, hath bid you *fear him who can destroy* the one and the other *in hell c.* And while he hath directed the views of his faithful disciples to the fair and pleasant fields of paradise above, describing them in all their beauty, verdure and glory; he hath set before *your* eyes a scene, which though figurative is expressive of real and intense misery, even *the pit that hath no bottom d, the worm that never dieth e, outer darkness f, and fire unquenchable g.* O! who can tell what are the terrors of the second death? or describe what is meant by the *power of his anger h,* who *is a consuming fire i;* and by *the wrath* not of the lion only, but of the abused and provoked *Lamb k?* Enough however we

a Rom. ii. 6, 8, 9. *b* 2 Thess. i. 8, 9. *c* Matt. x. 28.
d Rev. ix. 1, &c. *e* Mark ix. 44. *f* Matt. viii. 12.
g Mark ix. 44. *h* Psal. xc. 11. *i* Heb. xii. 29.
k Rev. vi. 16.

know of it, even from this general representation, to put an infinite *importance* into the one grand concern recommended in our text.

PART III.

AFTER what hath been said, one should suppose there need be nothing farther added, to confirm the argument under consideration. And yet,

III. There are some collateral proofs or illustrations of the infinite *importance* of religion, which, though I shall not particularly enlarge on them, must not be omitted. Let us then,

1. Consider who is the great *object* and author of religion. It is the blessed God. A being who possesses all greatness and excellence in their highest perfection: who hath all imaginable charms of beauty and goodness, to attract our esteem and love; whose regard to justice, truth and holiness are firm and invariable: and whose power is equal to his most tender compassions, and his most righteous resentments. O who can describe the majesty and glory of God! He is incomprehensible, immense and eternal. Heaven is his throne, and the earth his footstool. Myriads of pure and perfect spirits are his intimate friends and immediate attendants. All the powers of nature are subject to his controul, and all the infinitely numerous and complicated affairs of the universe, are directed and governed by one act of his will. In a word, when we have attentively contemplated God in all the works of his hands, have given our imagination leave to wander beyond the boundaries of sense into the other world, and have exerted the utmost powers of reason and faith in the search of him; how small a part of his ways do we understand? *Who can by searching find out God? who can find out the Almighty to perfection a?* And now, amidst the splendours of this great and glorious Being, what amazing dignity and importance are reflected upon religion, which hath the ONE ETERNAL GOD for its grand object? A general idea of the beauty, variety and use of the works of nature, gives a pleasing and venerable sanction to the profession of the philosopher, whose business it is to lay open these scenes of wonder to our view. But what infinitely greater importance is stampt

a Job xi. 7.

upon religion, by a general idea of God himself: since its professed business is, to lead us beyond these stupendous effects of wisdom and power, into an acquaintance with the great Author of them all?

2. From the *nature* and *value* of the soul, which is the proper seat of its residence, we may also farther infer the infinite utility and importance of religion. How curiously is the soul of man framed: It is a rational intelligent spirit, endowed with the powers of perception, judgment, reflection and consciousness; with a will to impel us to action; and with numerous affections to facilitate our actions, and to give them each its proper denomination as either good or bad. Now, however these faculties are employed, it is evident from the nature of the soul itself, and from the restlessness and disappointment which attend all worldly and sensual pursuits, that the end for which it was originally formed is not, cannot be attained, unless religion be its object. How ignoble is the appearance which the immortal spirit makes, while held under the abject and cruel dominion of bodily appetites and affections, and while drudging on in the paths of ignorance, sin and wretchedness! But what dignity, beauty and glory does it assume, when it is delivered by the grace of God from this sad captivity, is refined from the gross impurities of sin and sense, is enlightened with divine knowledge, is fired with truly noble and exalted prospects, and is quickened to the most rational, spiritual and heavenly pursuits! From the nature, therefore, and capacities of the soul, of which some judgment is to be formed even in this its depraved and apostate state, the indispensable *importance* of true religion may be clearly inferred. It is also farther to be considered,

3. That religion extends its influence to *a future and eternal world*. It is not a concern of the present life only, as we have already seen, but hath respect to an endless duration in another state. ETERNITY!—We are absorbed, swallowed up, lost in the idea. If it is a consideration which adds great weight to any worldly affair, that it is likely to affect our happiness many years to come; how weighty, how important a matter must religion be! When millions of years have rolled around, the immortal spirit will be but beginning in its existence. And upon this great question, whether we are interested in Christ,

are born again, and have entered into the spirit of real religion, will turn the happiness or misery of our future and everlasting condition. "The eternal salvation of one soul, says an ingenious and pious writer *a*, is of greater importance, and big with greater events, than the temporal salvation of an whole kingdom, though it were for the space of ten thousand ages; because there will come up a point, an instant in eternity, when that one soul shall have existed as many ages as all the individuals of an whole kingdom, ranged in close succession, will in the whole have existed in ten thousand ages. Therefore one soul is capable of a larger share of happiness or misery throughout an endless duration, (for that will be before it still) than an whole kingdom is capable of in ten thousand ages." *What*, O what then, *will it profit a man, if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul b?*

But what tends to fix upon the mind such a reverence for the one thing needful, as is never—never to be obliterated, is,

4. And lastly, that it owes its existence, with all the comforts and powers of it in this life, and all the joys and triumphs of it in another, to *the humiliation and death of the Son of God.* Behold the supreme Majesty of heaven *tabernacling among men c*; him *in whom dwelt all the fulness of the Godhead bodily d*, and *who thought it no robbery to be equal with God, humbling himself, and becoming obedient to death, even the death of the cross e*: and all this with a view, to repair the injuries which sin had offered to the divine government, to make way for the return of the blessed Spirit to the temple he had forsaken, and so again to possess it of this heavenly blessing of which I have been discoursing. Behold, I say, this unfathomable condescension of divine goodness on the one hand; and the stupendous expressions of majesty and glory attending it, in the resurrection and ascension of Jesus, on the other; and then say whether there is not an *importance* in religion which infinitely exceeds, not only all human measures, but these by which the most exalted seraph about the throne of God, is used to compute. The groans of the expiring Saviour, the victory he ob-

a Dr. Doddridge. *b* Matt. xvi. 26. *c* John i. 1—14.
d Col. ii. 9. *e* Phil. ii. 6, 8.

tained over the powers of darkness, the joys of heaven upon his return thither, and the descent of his Spirit to our earth; all proclaim with a loud voice this grand, essential, and most interesting truth—That religion is *the one thing needful.* In short, when we have said that it exists and lives through the death and mediation of the Son of God, we have said the utmost which can be imagined, by a finite mind, to reflect an importance and solemnity, as well as a beauty and glory on this great concern. But I forbear to enlarge here, leaving each one, amidst this scene of wonders, to his own contemplations.

The subject however of the necessity of religion must not be dismissed, without a word or two by way of *improvement.*

1. How astonishing is the infatuation of mankind in general, that they concern themselves so little about an affair of so interesting a nature! The fact is too true to be disputed. Look where we will, we see men with the greatest eagerness pursuing their worldly advantage. Either the riches, the honours, or the pleasures of the present life, are with them the one thing needful. So they consider these temporary and unsatisfying enjoyments, amidst all the plain evidence they daily have before their eyes of their wretched mistake; and even amidst the convincing proofs which sometimes strike their consciences, of the truth and importance of religion. But how sad a reflection is this on all their boasted wisdom and prudence! It hath ever been a maxim, admitted even by those who have the slenderest pretences to wisdom, that what is of *the greatest moment* should be *first* and *chiefly attended to.* But how egregiously do these men of wisdom contradict the very maxim, by which they would be thought to govern their conduct! Religion, which is confessedly the most important concern, is treated with the utmost indifference and neglect. How justly then does such a behaviour merit the description of madness and folly, which the Bible every where gives it!

And how affecting a proof doth this furnish of the degeneracy of human nature! Can it be questioned that sin hath drawn a vail of darkness over the minds of men, and that it hath brought a disease of the most fatal tendency upon their hearts? It is impossible, methinks, for any one to sit down and seriously consider this mournful fact, without acknowledging that the whole

world is apostatized from God, and sunk into guilt and misery. Convinced however, as the Christian is, of the reality and importance of religion, it would argue a strange kind of insensibility in *him*, were he not,

2. With earnestness and affection to exhort men to a serious attention to it. So Jesus and his apostles did, so we are commanded to do, and while we do it, have the dictates of sound wisdom on our side, as sufficiently appears from what hath been already said. They who have been made sensible of the value of their own souls, and have entered into the spirit of those great things of which we have been treating, cannot but feel a concern for the welfare of others. And how natural to express this concern for our acquaintance, friends, and relations, by our tears, expostulations, and prayers!

Supposing it then sinners, only *possible* that the things you have heard *may* be true; how can you acquit yourselves of the charge of imprudence and folly to the last degree, while you resolutely turn a deaf ear to those remonstrances? What is this better than laying violent hands on your own souls, and wilfully plunging yourselves in death and destruction? *He that sinneth against me*, says Wisdom, *wrongeth his own soul; and all they that hate me, love death a.* O! may you be persuaded, then, to listen to the voice of wisdom! Compare the dictates of scripture with those of your own consciences. Set the interests of this world in the balance with those of another. Reflect on the miserable state you are in, while at enmity with God and religion. Retire into your closets, converse with your own hearts, and pray God, if peradventure your folly and disobedience may be forgiven you. So would we most heartily commend you to his rich and boundless mercy, through Jesus Christ, and to the mighty influence of his grace and Spirit. To conclude,

3. What abundant cause have you for joy and thankfulness, who are interested in the one thing needful, and have with Mary *chosen the better part, which shall not be taken away from you b.* In proportion to the importance of this great concern, so should be the cheerfulness of your spirits, and the gratitude of your hearts. Give God the praise; for from him it

a Prov. viii. 36. b Luke x. 42.

is you derive this inestimable blessing. Had he bestowed on you a crown, and denied you the one thing needful, you would have been miserable.

And since you possess that which is most necessary and desirable, and with which is connected the promise of every thing which infinite wisdom sees fit for you, *be not careful and troubled* about the many trifling affairs and enjoyments of the present life. They are trifling indeed, when compared with those momentous concerns of which we have been discoursing. Let not, therefore, an unbecoming anxiety about them ruffle your breasts, sadden your countenances, or disgrace your religion. Having sought first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, you are assured that *all other things shall be added to you*; that *God will withhold no good thing from you a*; and that *your heavenly Father careth for you b*. Refer, then, your temporal interests to the direction of a wise and good Providence: and having intrusted your immortal spirits to the care of the Lord Jesus Christ, rest satisfied that he will *keep what you have thus committed to him, against the great day c*.

DISCOURSE V.

THE DIFFICULTIES ATTENDING RELIGION.

MATT. XVI. 24.—*Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.*

THAT there is a reality in serious religion, and that it is the most important concern of the present life, surely no thoughtful person will deny. Yet, alas! sad experience sufficiently proves, that a general persuasion of these things is ineffectual to determine men to the pursuit of it. The truth is, there are certain prejudices against the one thing needful, arising from the

a Psal. lxxxiv. 11. b Luke xii. 30, 31. c 2 Tim. i. 12.

supposed unsurmountable *difficulties* attending it, which have taken such deep root in the human heart, that they unreasonably overpower all transient convictions of its importance.

To trace these *prejudices* up to their original source would be no difficult task; though to enumerate all the immediate causes of them, and to describe particularly the manner of their taking effect, would carry me too far beside my present design. It must, however, be observed in general, that mankind are in a fallen and depraved state, and that the heart hath received a bias quite opposite to what it had in the beginning. Men are prone to vanity and sin, and averse to that which is spiritual and good. And this disaffection to religion operates, by disposing the mind to admit readily every objection which is unfavourable to it, whether real or only imaginary. The chief therefore of these practical *objections* I propose to consider, to set them in their full light, and give them their due weight; that we may see how far their usual influence upon the heart, in the face of all the evidence we have of the truth and importance of religion, is to be justified, even upon the principles of natural reason.

They are reducible to three heads—The restraints which religion obliges us to lay upon our inclinations and passions; we must *deny ourselves*.—The afflictions and sufferings in which it does or may involve us; we must *take up our cross*.—And that perfection of character it seems to enjoin; we must *follow Christ*. All this our Saviour tells us is necessary to our becoming his disciples. The explanation, therefore, of these sacred injunctions, will give me an opportunity of shewing, that some of those difficulties which are apt to startle the mind at the first appearance of religion, are entirely groundless; and that others, though they may be real difficulties in the apprehension of depraved nature, yet are most fit and reasonable to be complied with.

In the mean while it may throw some light upon the text, to advert a moment to the occasion of our Lord's thus addressing his disciples. He had been foretelling his approaching sufferings. Upon which Peter, urged by the violence of his natural passions, and not considering the indispensable importance of our Saviour's death, began to rebuke him, saying, *Be it far*

from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee. But Jesus turned, and with unusual severity said unto Peter, *Get thee behind me Satan,* thou actest the part of a devil and an adversary instead of a friend, *thou art an offence to me;* for it should seem by this thy language, that *thou savourest not the things which be of God, but those which be of men a;* that thou hast lost sight of the great objects of my mission, the glory of God and the salvation of men, and art fondly dreaming, like the rest of the world, of temporal honours and pleasures. *Then said he to his disciples,* in order to guard them against this carnal temper, and to apprise them of what would be likely to befal them, *If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.* Nor are these injunctions to be limited to the immediate disciples of Christ: the occasion of the words, and the principles upon which you see he reasons, plainly shew that they are of more general use.

I. *Let him deny himself.*—"Strange!" say you, "what more dear to a man than himself? and what more contrary to the first principles, dictates, and feelings of human nature, than for men to deny, contradict, and oppose themselves?" But surely our Lord can never mean by this precept,

1. That we are to be *our own enemies,* and to act in opposition to our own real interests. This is a notion utterly repugnant to every sound dictate of nature and reason. *Self-love* is a principle which God hath himself implanted in our breasts, and it is so deeply rooted there, not to say how innocent and useful it is when held under proper restraints, that it cannot be eradicated without the dissolution of our very existence. Does our Lord, then, by requiring us *to deny ourselves,* make it necessary for us to extinguish this first principle of nature? Does he solemnly enjoin that upon us, which is absolutely impossible to be complied with?—True, indeed, the gospel demands our obedience upon motives of gratitude. But gratitude could have no place in our hearts, if a regard to our own interest were totally suppressed. For gratitude supposes a sense of favours received, and that a sensibility to our own good. If the gospel, therefore, were to silence this first dictate of nature, it would

a Ver. 22, 23.

contradict itself, and in effect forbid us to be influenced by this other motive of gratitude.

But so far is this from being the case, that it approves of self-love, cherishes it, reasons from it. Need you be told with what warmth our Saviour and his apostles every where address the hopes and fears of men, passions which are evidently founded in this original principle? *Flee from the wrath to come a. Fear him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell b.* And a verse or two after the text, *What is a man profited if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?* Language this which manifestly supposes that we *may*, that we *ought* to love ourselves, that is, be concerned, passionately concerned for our real, our highest, our everlasting happiness.

But you will say, "Though self-love, in this refined sense of it, as respecting our well-being hereafter, be allowable; yet by this command Christ would inculcate,

2. "A very unnatural kind of *indifference* to our present interests. *Let him deny himself;* that is, say you, Let him consider the appetites and passions of nature as unlawful, and oppose them as absolute evils; let him be totally dead to the world, and rather reject than pursue any of its emoluments or pleasures." But this surely can never be the sense of the text. For if it were, it would take that for granted, which is highly dishonourable to God, and most unreasonable in itself. For how is it imaginable that God would have us account the proper gratification of those appetites and passions, which he hath implanted in us, and which are not to be eradicated while we continue here, criminal? All those precepts, therefore, which, like that in our text, require us *to mortify our members which are on the earth c, to crucify the flesh with the affections and lusts d, to keep under our bodies, and bring them into subjection e,* and to be willing *to part with all we have, yea our very lives, for Christ's sake f;* are to be understood with certain limitations. They can never mean to lay the comforts and concerns of the present life under an absolute and perpetual interdict. They can never mean to justify an indolent neglect of the duties of our several stations, an unnatural contempt of innocent enjoy-

a Matt. iii. 7. *b* Matt. x. 28. *c* Col. iii. 5.
d Gal. v. 24. *e* 1 Cor. ix. 27. *f* Matt. xvi. 25.

ments, or a wanton sacrifice of our lives upon the most trifling occasions.

On the contrary, the Christian doctrine adopts these very principles and maxims respecting these matters which nature itself dictates. For while it teaches that *no man ever hated his own flesh* a, and that we ought *to do ourselves no harm* b, it persuades us to such a temper and deportment as manifestly tend to promote our outward happiness and prosperity. It recommends industry, cheerfulness, affability, sympathy and love c. So far is it from imbittering the comforts of life, or rendering them insipid and tasteless, that it adds a new flavour to them. So far is it from dragging us out of society, and shutting us up in indolent retirement, that it puts us upon improving our circumstances, maintaining a friendly commerce with our fellow-creatures, and doing them all the good which lies in our power. And so far is it from hardening the hearts of men against their own or the miseries of others, that it makes them susceptible of the tenderest emotions, and indeed of every impression which is beneficial to society.—Nor by requiring us *to deny ourselves* does our Lord mean,

3. To impose upon us any austerities, penances, or mortifications, which are purely arbitrary, and which tend not to answer some moral or spiritual purpose. He might indeed demand of us certain difficult and painful services, which should have no other intent than to serve as tests of our subjection to his authority. Yet even this he hath not done. I am aware that the two ordinances of baptism and the Lord's supper, are considered by some purely in this light. But it were easy to shew, that however they are properly enough on some accounts styled positive institutions, yet there is the truest reason in them, and they are evidently adapted to promote our edification and comfort. And though this precept of denying ourselves hath respect, as will hereafter appear, to our foregoing, under certain circumstances, our bodily ease and worldly interest; yet *these* instances of self-denial are not imposed upon us merely for their own sake, but because the glory of God, the good of

a Eph. v. 29. b Acts xvi. 28.
c Rom. xii. 11. 1 Thess. v. 16. 1 Pet. iii. 8. Col. iii. 12, 13.

others, and our own advantage upon the whole, make them fit and necessary.

It is not therefore purely with a view to thwart and oppose our natural inclinations, and to give us pain, and make us unhappy, that we are required in any instance whatever to deny ourselves. There are indeed those who pride themselves in the rigorous observance of popish severities, under a notion of complying with the injunction in the text; though rather, it is to be feared, with a secret expectation of commuting with heaven for other criminal indulgences, or however of getting a character for a kind of religious heroism. But their conduct is so far from being acceptable to God, that it is highly displeasing to him. And the Scriptures have not failed to condemn all this as a vain *shew of wisdom in will-worship, and humility, and neglecting the body a.*—Thus, you see, by denying ourselves, is not meant indifference to our interests in general; or a total disregard to our worldly interests in particular; or a subjection to any kind of voluntary mortifications or penances, merely for their own sake.

In what sense then is our Lord to be understood? He means surely such a *self-denial*, and such only, as is in itself, though very painful, yet most reasonable; and though very contrary to our depraved nature, yet upon the whole for our real advantage. Now here we must distinguish between matters which are absolutely, and in their own nature, unlawful, and those which become so by occasion only; in regard of each of which we are to deny ourselves.

1. It is unquestionably our duty to deny ourselves in every instance which is *absolutely criminal*. Human nature is miserably corrupted and depraved. Whence it happens that we feel innumerable inclinations and propensities in our breasts, which the least reflection must convince us are unreasonable, sinful and injurious. To describe them particularly would be an endless task, as they are almost infinitely diversified, by the different circumstances and objects which excite, inflame and aggravate them. I might here tell you of pride, avarice, lust, envy, malevolence, anger, revenge, and the like; all which the apostle describes by the characters of *the old man and his*

a Col. ii. 23.

deeds a, the body of sin b, and *the flesh, with its affections and lusts c.*

Now, these, be they what they may, must be denied. The very first risings of them must be checked and suppressed; all incitements to the gratification of them must be opposed; and all means and opportunities which offer to that purpose must be avoided. And it is easy to see that the thus denying them, especially if they are obstinate and impetuous, and if our temptations to the indulgence of them are numerous and powerful, will be very difficult and painful work. Hence it is described in scripture by the expressive figures of *mortification* and *crucifixion*, the *plucking out the right eye*, and *cutting off the right hand*. And hence the Christian life, the main duties of which consist in such self-denial, is compared to a warfare. Great vigilance, resolution and labour are necessary. We must be ever upon our guard against the undue influence of external objects, ever attentive to the exercises of our own minds, and ever vigorous in our opposition to the first motions or tendencies to sin. In the attempting all which, there will be many hard struggles and painful conflicts, the heart will be agitated by various passions, and the effect in some instances will be sad disappointment, and in others the most pleasing and happy success.

The reasonableness of this clearly appears, and the motives the gospel suggests to excite us to it, are very numerous and animating. But I shall wave the consideration hereof at present, as this will be the subject of the next discourse. Again,

2. The duty of *self-denial* hath respect to matters which are in themselves innocent and lawful, but which become otherwise by occasion. And such are all the enjoyments, concerns and connections of life, yea life itself. There is nothing desirable of an outward or worldly kind, but we must under certain circumstances be willing to part with. Be they what they may we must renounce them, when they come into competition with the honour of God and religion, with the everlasting welfare of our fellow-creatures, and with our own highest and noblest interests. It is criminal in either of these cases, not to deny ourselves of what we might otherwise very lawfully and properly enjoy. But of this we shall discourse more largely hereafter.

a Col. iii. 9. b Rom. vi. 6. c Gal. v. 24.

Hitherto we have treated the subject of *self-denial* in general only. Let us now descend to particulars. What then are those instances of self-denial which are especially required of us, in order to our becoming the disciples of Christ? I answer: as *pride* and *pleasure* are the prevailing passions of human nature, and the main obstructions to religion; so to these two may be referred all the various expressions of this duty, which our Saviour would inculcate.

First, As to *pride*. The opposition which arises from hence to religion in general, and to the doctrine and service of Christ in particular, cannot but strike every considerate observer. There is,

1. A vain conceit of their own reason, which, if men will fear God, and be the disciples of Jesus, they must deny and subdue. I mean not by this to reflect in the least on reason itself. It is a faculty with which God hath graciously endowed us, and which when duly exercised, is of the highest importance in matters of religion as well as those of a civil nature. But my meaning is to condemn what is falsely so called, and to expose that vain and confident opinion of their own understanding and judgment, which hurries too many into the most fatal and dangerous mistakes *a*. The weakness and imperfection of the human mind no thoughtful person will deny. Nor will he deny that men are prone, in their reasonings on matters of religion especially, to be swayed and biassed by the corrupt passions and prejudices of their hearts. Whence it happens that in many instances they reason very falsely; and in others, though they reason truly from certain principles, yet those principles being false, they err in their conclusions.

a Dr. Young, speaking of the enemies of Christianity, who, while they idolize reason, do in effect vilify it, thus describes that kind of arrogance it is here meant to condemn:

> While love of truth through all their camp resounds,
> They draw pride's curtain o'er the noon-tide ray,
> Spike up their inch of reason, on the point
> Of philosophic wit, call'd argument,
> And then exulting in their taper, cry,
> "Behold the sun:" and Indian-like adore.
>
> Night Thoughts.

Now the divine authority of the Scriptures being admitted, (which it surely well may, the evidence is so clear and incontestible) what is therein plainly declared should be meekly received, though we may be at a loss to clear up some difficulties attending it. Absolute contradictions God cannot require us to believe, because in that case he would require us to believe a falsehood, it being impossible that two propositions, which directly contradict each other, should be both true. But there are truths he may require us to believe, which though they are not contradictory, we may be at a loss fully to explain and reconcile. These therefore we are to receive upon the divine testimony; and upon the whole it is most reasonable we should do so, however unwilling we may be through prejudice to yield our assent *a*.

Here then is one instance of *self-denial*, the meekly submitting to divine instruction, and not expecting more evidence upon a matter, than the nature of the thing will admit, or than God chooses to give. Nothing can be more fit and reasonable than this: yet so conceited are we of our own understanding, that it is with the utmost difficulty we are brought to acknowledge our ignorance, fallibility, and weakness. And such a false glare does prejudice many times cast upon the truth, that we had need use the greatest force with our passions, to prevent our being thereby deceived and misled. Hence our Lord makes a point of it with his disciples, that they *be converted and become as little children b*, that is, that they be of a teachable disposi-

a Dr. Barrow, speaking of faith, says—"There can hardly be any greater instance of respect and love toward any person, than a ready yielding of assent to his words, when he doth aver things to our conceit absurd or incredible; than resting on his promise when he seemeth to offer things impossible, or strangely difficult; than embracing his advice when he recommendeth things very cross to our interest, humour and pleasure; whence Abraham's faith," &c. ——He afterwards adds—"and many things doth the Christian doctrine propose, apt to try such friendship; many a hard saying doth it assert, which a profane mind can hardly swallow or digest: there is indeed scarce any article of faith at which we shall not boggle; any matter of duty which we shall not start at, any promise of God whereat we shall not stagger, if we be not seasoned with favourable apprehensions and inclinations towards him who recommendeth them to us, as endued with those attributes which secure their credibility."

BARROW on the AP. CREED, Ser. ii. p. 26: *fol. edit*

b Matt. xviii. 3.

tion, readily acknowledging that they comparatively know nothing. And hence the apostle speaks of the efficacy of his preaching through God, *to the casting down imaginations*, or reasonings *a*, *and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God b*. Another expression of *self-denial* is,

2. The submitting cordially to that method of salvation which the gospel proposes. A scheme it is, wherein the wisdom, righteousness, and goodness of God are most amazingly displayed. *God is reconciling sinners to himself* by the death of his Son, *not imputing their trespasses to them c*. But such is the pride of the human heart, that the grace expressed in this scheme becomes one principal prejudice with many against it. They vainly presume that they are innocent, virtuous, and good, or to use our Saviour's words to the Laodiceans, that they *are rich and in need of nothing d*: and so, not willing to renounce their own imaginary merit and righteousness in the sight of God, they treat the proposals of his mercy with indifference and neglect. Such was the temper and conduct of the Jews, of whom the apostle witnesseth, that *being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, they submitted not themselves to the righteousness of God e*. And such was also the temper of many among the wise and learned Greeks, to whom *the preaching of the cross was foolishness f*. Now if we will be the disciples of Christ, *self* must in this instance, as well as the former, be denied. We must come, guilty, wretched, and helpless as we are, and receive *eternal life* as *the gift of God through Jesus Christ* alone. Again,

3. We must *deny ourselves*, in respect of that vain confidence we are apt to place in our own strength. Self-sufficience is a prevailing evil. For want of a thorough knowledge of their hearts, and through a strange propensity to flattery and self-deceit, men hastily judge themselves equal to almost every duty which is required of them, and every temptation and affliction which may happen to them. The effect of which is a criminal disregard to the influence of divine providence and grace, and such a carelessness of temper as almost unavoidably betrays

a Λογισμὸς. *b* 2 Cor. x. 5. *c* 2 Cor. v. 19.
d Rev. iii. 17. *e* Rom. x. 3. *f* 1 Cor. i. 18.

them into the most dangerous mistakes. This confidence therefore must be renounced; and, while we exert all the powers of the soul in the service of our divine Master, we must rely on his grace for success, and having succeeded, must give him the glory. It were endless to lead you into all the labyrinths of pride there are in the human heart—endless to tell you what vanity, what self-complacency, what superior ideas of our attainments, gifts and graces, we too often feel within. Wherefore, in the denying, restraining and subduing them, consists much of the experience and practice of religion. It is no inconsiderable expression of this duty, when we are in the height of spiritual prosperity, *to abhor ourselves, and repent in dust and ashes*; when we have enjoyed communion with God, and the refined pleasures which result from a sense of his favour, to blush at our own vileness and unworthiness; and when we have gained some eminent victory in our Christian warfare, with all humility to ascribe the honours of it, not to ourselves, but to the power and grace of Christ.—In such instances as these, which do immediately affect the pride and vanity of the human heart, must *self* be *denied*.

Let us now consider this duty in reference,

Secondly, To *pleasure*. By pleasure I mean the gratification of the appetites of animal nature, and of all those passions which have worldly good for their object. Various are the enjoyments, to which mankind feel a strong and unconquerable propensity; such as health, ease, freedom, peace, wealth, honour, and the pleasures resulting from family and social connections, and from intellectual improvements. Nor is a propensity to them unlawful; for they are the gifts of indulgent providence, and the proper use of them tends to our comfort and happiness. Yet there are two cases wherein we are *to deny ourselves* of even these comforts, that is, to forego the possession or enjoyment of them.—The one is more general, when our desire of them exceeds due bounds, and is in danger of destroying, or however, weakening and enfeebling the nobler affections and principles of the renewed mind.—And the other more particular, when the gratification of this or the other appetite or passion, clashes with our duty, and prevents or disturbs us in the faithful and regular discharge of it.

It is a fact beyond all dispute, that we are apt to exceed in our estimation of worldly things, and our fondness for the enjoyment of them; which is the effect, partly of the corruption of human nature, and partly of our close and intimate connection with sensible objects. And this excess of the passions very essentially injures us, not only by disturbing the composure of the mind, engrossing too much of our time, and hurrying us into unreasonable and dangerous pursuits; but by palling our appetite, and producing a very hurtful and criminal indifference to refined and spiritual enjoyments. On these accounts, the Christian very justly considers the world as his enemy, and complains frequently, in the bitterness of his spirit, of the encroachments it makes on his best interests. Whence it follows, that in order to preserve a balance in his heart, I should rather say, in order to secure the weight on the side of the infinitely important concerns of God and religion, it is necessary he should *deny himself* occasionally, of a great many comforts and indulgences, he might otherwise lawfully enjoy. Nor will he be at any great loss to determine when this should be done, if he attentively regards the present state of his mind. Do we feel, which is most commonly the case, too strong a bent of the heart and affections to the world? That bent is no otherwise to be counteracted and subdued, with the help of divine grace, than by a resolute *denial* of our impetuous desires in this or the other instance which offers. So farther,

When the gratification of our appetites and passions is in any particular instance incompatible with some duty, whether civil or religious, which immediately demands our attention, it is without doubt to be denied. I might put many cases of this sort, which very frequently occur. They are, however, all reducible to these general heads—the regular discharge of the duties of religious worship—the exerting ourselves, on some special and extraordinary occasions, for the advancement of the kingdom and interest of Christ—the bearing a public testimony to the truths of religion—the shewing proper offices of kindness to our fellow-creatures and fellow-Christians—and, as hath been already hinted, the keeping up the discipline of the heart, and cultivating the several Christian graces. It is easy to see, that in innumerable instances of this sort, if we will ac-

quit ourselves as becometh men, much more the disciples of Jesus, we must violently thwart and oppose our natural inclinations and propensities, must rouse ourselves out of a supine, inactive, slothful state, must sacrifice many desirable enjoyments of an outward kind, nay, be content to endure many pains, sorrows and disappointments, which for their own sake, we cannot but wish to escape, yea even death itself. In this sense our Lord is to be understood, when he speaks of our *forsaking houses, brethren, sisters, father, mother, wife, children, and lands for his sake* [a]. But the consideration of suffering falls more properly under the next head of discourse.

Thus have we seen wherein the duty of *self-denial* consists, and what are the principal expressions of it, in reference to *pride* and *pleasure*, the two prevailing passions of human nature.

PART II.

We come now to the second branch of duty, our Saviour requires of the man who will be his disciple:

II. *Let him take up his cross.* By the cross is meant persecution chiefly; but it may not be amiss to extend the idea to all that anxiety and trouble, in which the experience and profession of religion are commonly supposed to involve the Christian. Now, before we come to enumerate these afflictions, and to shew how they ought to be endured, it will be necessary, in order to remove all groundless prejudices against the service of Christ on this account, to enquire how far they are, and how far they are not, to be set down to the account of religion. The fact then is admitted, that he who will become a disciple of Christ, must take up his cross. But it is to be remembered,

1. In regard of the *sorrows of the mind*; that be they what they may, they are not, properly speaking, the offspring of religion, but of those disordered faculties of the mind, and of those depraved affections of the heart, which it is the kind office of the grace of God to rectify and cure. They take their rise either from natural gloominess of constitution, or an occasional depression of the animal spirits, or mistaken apprehensions of divine truths, or a wrong interpretation of particular providences, or a doubtfulness of our interest in the favour of God, or strug-

[a] Matt. xix. 29.

gles with corrupt passions, or the temptations of Satan, or in a word, a suspension for wise ends, of those divine comforts which were formerly enjoyed. These are the true sources of all that anxiety, perturbation and distress, which sometimes spread darkness over our countenances, and give the most sorrowful accents to our prayers.

Our unhappiness therefore is owing to frailty and sin: nor is religion any otherwise accessory to it, than as with a divine influence it brings us to our senses, and makes us capable of knowing and feeling what without it would prove our ruin. And should it on this account be censured? It would surely argue great perverseness, to impute the pains a sick friend endures, to his medicines instead of his disease. Or supposing his medicines were the occasions of some temporary uneasiness in the course of their operation, it would be no less folly to find fault with them on that account; since this very circumstance would afford a promising symptom of their success. In like manner, how strange is it that religion should stand charged with all those miseries, which are the natural product of the disease itself it is intended to cure; or that men should be prejudiced against it, on account of the painfulness of its operation, when they cannot but see, that this is rather the effect of the opposition it meets with from irregular passions, than of its own supposed unpleasant and irksome nature? To this objection therefore it may be answered, in much the same words the apostle uses when speaking of the law of God: *Is that which is good, made death unto me? God forbid. But sin, that it might appear sin, working death in me by that which is good a.* Nay, on the contrary, it may be truly affirmed, that its influence is most kind and salutary. Nor is religion,

2. The natural and necessary source of *outward troubles.* That good men meet with their disappointments and sorrows is not to be questioned. Nay it may, and often does so happen, that a greater proportion of them falls to their share than to others. But it is a false and injurious representation of religion, that it tends, in its own nature, to procure outward pain and suffering. The reverse is the case. They therefore reflect highly on the blessed God, who affect to speak of him, as

a Rom. vii. 13.

if he were fond of afflicting those who most nearly resemble him; and, as if he took pleasure in such unnatural offerings of pennance and severity, as Romanists are forward to present him. No; the troubles of the present life are all of them the effects of sin: and if Providence convert these natural evils into blessings, which is the case with respect to those who love God; it is surely no just prejudice against the service of Christ, that his disciples endure more of them than others.

And then, as to *persecution*, though it be admitted that they who will live godly in Christ Jesus, must suffer reproach and abuse; it is however to be remembered, that this happens through the malice of Satan, and the malevolence of wicked men. And will any one say, that it does, in the least, detract from the native excellency of religion, that apostate spirits are the avowed enemies of it? Or is it reasonable to expect that God should continually work miracles, to rescue his favourites from those evils, which may nevertheless be over-ruled for their good, even in this life, and shall most certainly be rewarded with infinite joys and triumphs in another? And after all, persecution, in the fullest and most painful sense of the expression, falls not to the share of every Christian. We have no reason therefore to be offended at our Saviour for telling us, that if we will be his disciples, we must *take up our cross*, and so follow him.

Let me now then more particularly describe the *cross*, and the manner in which we are required to bear it. To begin, in the

First place, with *afflictions of a religious kind.* It were wrong to flatter men with a notion, that as soon as they shall commence disciples of Christ, they shall become perfectly happy. This is not to be expected. The judgment, how well soever it be informed, will sometimes be perplexed with doubts. And whatever peace religion begets in the conscience, that peace will sometimes be disturbed and interrupted. Truth does not always strike the mind with the like evidence and conviction; nor does it always afford the like refreshment and joy to the heart. Now we shall see the Christian, in the course of his enquiries, embarrassed with unexpected difficulties, and it may be too upon the most interesting points; whence results a great

deal of anxiety and distress. Now hurried with gloomy thoughts, suggestions and temptations, which, though involuntary, make him very unhappy. Now struggling with corrupt passions and affections, and almost worn out with the conflict. Now questioning his interest in the favour of God, and writing bitter things against himself. Now walking in darkness and in the shadow of death, enjoying little comfort and enlargement in duty, and oppressed with many sad apprehensions and fears concerning futurity. These, it must be acknowledged, are some of his severest crosses; afflictions which very deeply and sensibly affect his heart, damp his spirits, and enervate all the powers of his soul. Insomuch that he can scarcely forbear expressing himself in the sorrowful language of the psalmist, *Will the Lord cast off for ever? Will he be favourable no more? Hath he forgotten to be gracious? Hath he in anger shut up his tender mercies a?*

Yet these trials, so far as they are his affliction, not his sin, are to be endured with patience and constancy. We are not to yield to the suggestions of Satan, or the discouragement of our own timorous hearts; not yet to murmur at the chastening hand of God, or take occasion from thence to indulge hard thoughts of religion. But, on the contrary, we are to resolve, in a dependence on divine grace, still to pursue our duty; be the opposition and difficulty we meet with ever so painful and distressing. And this surely is most reasonable, since these trials, not to say how far we are ourselves accessory to them, are often a very necessary part of Christian experience, and are over-ruled by a wise and good God to the most salutary and beneficial purposes. But it is,

SECONDLY, *Outward trouble* our Lord here chiefly, if not wholly intends. And it were endless to describe the many inconveniences, pains and miseries, to which good men are liable for the sake of religion, and which, under certain circumstances, are scarcely to be avoided. Persecution assumes various forms, and innumerable are the instruments by which the wicked gratify their resentments against those who fear God. Here I might tell you of the shyness, indifference and neglect, with which some humble, serious Christians are treated, by their most in-

a Psal. lxxvii. 7—9.

timate relations and connections in life; of the invidious reflections cast upon their understanding and prudence, as if they were fools or madmen; of the reproach and obloquy with which their characters are loaded, as if they were hypocrites and deceivers; of the discouragements thrown in the way of their worldly interests; of the abridgment of their liberties, the spoiling of their goods, and the abuse of their persons; of fines, imprisonments, and even death itself. Crosses these hard to be borne, even by such who are best prepared to endure them; since the grace of God does not divest men of the passions and feelings of humanity.

And they are crosses which have been imposed upon good men, more or less, in every age. The history of religion, from the very beginning, furnishes innumerable instances of this sort. Between the seed of the woman and of the serpent, that is, between the kingdom of Christ and of Satan, there ever hath been, and ever will be, an irreconcileable enmity. So that the bloody scene exhibited in the martyrdom of righteous Abel, hath been acted over again, in thousands of his meek and pious successors. And if at any time the violence of persecution hath abated, it hath not been owing to the utter extirpation of that malevolent spirit which inspires it; but perhaps chiefly to a want of power in wicked men, on the one hand, to compass their cruel purposes; or to a decay of real religion among good men, on the other, which hath nearly extinguished the usual provocation to it. Indeed it is our happiness to live in an age, wherein the principles, both of civil and religious liberty, are better understood than they were formerly; and wherein good sense, moderation and humanity, have prevailed to render persecution, at least in the open and most obnoxious sense of the word, unfashionable. Nor should we forget, while history holds up to our view the sufferings of our renowned ancestors, to acknowledge the great goodness of God herein. Yet even now, there are few who nobly resolve, at all events, to express a becoming zeal for religion, but meet with slights and discouragements of one kind or other, which may, without the charge of affectation, come under the denomination of *the cross*.

What then is the spirit of this command of our Saviour *to take up* the cross? It can never intend that we are to court per-

secution. That were madness indeed. Calumny and abuse, hunger and want, the dungeon and the stake, are not surely to be coveted: nor can it be right, through a false kind of emulation to win the crown of martyrdom, to take indirect measures to procure it. For by so doing, we betray a vanity and wantonness of mind, which is very unsuitable to the true genius and spirit of the gospel; nay, we become accessaries to the crime of which they are guilty, whom we thus tempt to commit this great evil. It should be our care therefore, that we do not by an imprudent behaviour, or by an indecent boldness, provoke the enemies of truth and religion, to a conduct, which must in the end involve them in misery. Nor does our Lord mean to forbid a proper resistance to suffering, when that is in our power. *When we are persecuted in one city*, we are to *flee to another a.* If we can tie up the hands of the oppresser, or prudently ward off the blow he meditates, we are hereby doing a kindness to him as well as ourselves. Nay, we may lawfully defend *our own* lives and properties, even though it be at the manifest hazard of *theirs* who would deprive us of them, provided all other means are ineffectual. And yet, in regard of some lesser evils, it were better quietly to endure them, than by an obstinate defence, endanger the still greater damage of him who would injure us, and risk the charge of malevolence and revenge.

But, when the only alternative is suffering or sinning, bearing the cross or violating conscience, we are not allowed to hesitate a moment upon the question. We are *to take it up*, to carry it, yea, if such be the will of God, to resign our lives thereon. Now this injunction of our Lord's includes in it—the counting of suffering before hand—the meeting it with coolness and composure—the enduring it with meekness and resolution—and, what is more than all this, the glorying in it as our highest honour.

1. It is our wisdom, when we first become the disciples of Christ, to set before our eyes the risks we are to run, and the dangers we are to encounter in his service. What if imagination be allowed to paint these scenes in the strongest colours? It will be a likely means to try the sincerity and ardour of our love,

a Matt. x. 23.

and to prepare us for what may be the event. Our Lord had the utmost tenderness for his immediate followers; yet he forebore not to discourse frequently with them on subjects of this nature. *Behold I send you forth as sheep among wolves. They will deliver you up to the councils, and scourge you in their synagogues. Ye shall be brought before governors and kings, and be hated of all men for my sake a.* Sad tidings these! But was it merely to alarm their fears, that he thus addressed them? No —He had more compassion for them than all this! His view was to put them in a fit posture to meet what was coming upon them. It had been his own practice to ruminate frequently on his future sufferings. Deserts, mountains, and solitary places, had borne witness to these his preparations for affliction and death. He would therefore recommend it to them by contemplation and prayer, *to take up the cross*, and follow him. And thus are we to gird up our loins for the race we have to run; and ere we set out on our warfare, to count the cost. And what will be the effect,

2. But the meeting our sufferings with calmness and composure of mind? a temper admirably expressed by the phrase in the text. The enemy may assault us on a sudden; and surprises are dangerous. Our Lord, in one of his parables, speaks of those hearers of the word, who, *having no root in themselves, when persecution or tribulation ariseth, are* quickly *offended b.* But he who hath often, at proper seasons, anticipated the discouragements he may endure for Christ's sake, and hath boldly ventured on a profession of religion in the prospect of them; though when they arise, he may sensibly feel them, yet, to use the language of scripture, he will not *be afraid with* any *amazement. Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you c*, was the calm advice of an apostle, who had not only long borne the cross, but knew that he should one day actually suffer death thereon. What self-possession, what admirable composure and serenity of mind, did the primitive Christians many of them enjoy, when they beheld the blackest storms of persecution just bursting on their heads! Whilst their persecutors breathed out threatenings and slaughter, and were mad with rage and resentment, they could coolly reason and reflect,

a Matt. x. 16—22. b Matt. xiii. 21. c 1 Pet. iv. 12.

they could with divine eloquence expostulate and persuade. Be our afflictions then what they may, in such manner it is our duty to meet them. And if we thus *take up the cross*, we shall be likely,

3. To bear it with meekness and resolution. A base, servile submission to the impositions and abuses of unreasonable men, is unworthy of a Christian. It is a temper which, as I said before, the text by no means countenances. Our Saviour himself shewed a noble superiority to it; as did also the great apostle, who stands distinguished in the list of his suffering followers. Yet, with a generous sense of freedom, and a spirit on every proper occasion to assert it, that meekness our Lord here inculcates well consists. It is truly noble, with the gentleness of a lamb, to endure the miseries which are not to be escaped, but at the expence of truth and conscience; to suppress every unbecoming thought of the Divine providence which permits them: to forbear all indecent and clamorous reflections on the immediate instruments of them; and to pour out our sincere and compassionate addresses to Heaven, on behalf of those who are maliciously threatening our destruction. But there is a yet higher and nobler attainment, to which as the disciples of Jesus, we should aspire; and that is,

4. Glorying in the cross of Christ. He who suffers in the cause of religion, may be justly considered as the favourite of heaven, and the man whom God delights to honour. He is dignified above many of his fellow-disciples, by being thus employed in the most interesting services for the church of Christ, and indeed mankind in general. His behaviour, if it be such as hath been represented, hath a direct and mighty influence to confirm the faith of other Christians, to fix a conviction of the truth on the consciences of the wicked, and to command the reverence, if not affection, of all beholders. And, besides the divine consolations he may reasonably hope to enjoy, in the severest moments of trial; there awaits him a crown of unfading glory in the world to come. Well may he therefore, animated by these considerations, like his divine Master, *endure the cross and despise the shame a!* Well may he *take pleasure*, as the apostle expresses it, *in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities,*

a Heb. xii. 2.

in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake a! Well may he, in a word, by the grace of God, not only with meekness bear the cross, but even triumph amidst the horrors of death itself!

And now what objection can we have to this sacred injunction? It is most fit and reasonable. Nay, it ought to be most cheerfully complied with. For if we do sincerely love Christ, we have every imaginable consideration, to inflame our zeal and animate our breasts in his service. But this is a subject I must refer to the next discourse.

PART III.

LET us now proceed to the third and last expression of obedience, which our Saviour demands of his disciples; and that is,

III. *To follow him.* Indeed the phrase in this place is understood by some, as only a redundancy of expression. *If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and* so *follow me,* or come after me. But I think it adds a beauty to the passage, as well as amplifies the sense of it, to consider this last clause, as designed to convey some farther distinct idea of our duty. You see our Lord rises by degrees. Self-denial he recommends in the first place. Then a patient submission to suffering. And last of all, a general conformity to his will, and imitation of his example. In the former instances, what he requires is chiefly negative, in this it is wholly positive.

Now our Saviour's character, it is acknowledged on all hands, was in the strictest sense perfect. So that when he requires us *to follow him,* in order to our becoming his disciples, it may seem as if he expected that of us, which is in its own nature impossible, I mean an *absolute perfection* of character. Before, therefore, we proceed to illustrate the duty here enjoined, it may be proper to obviate this farther prejudice against religion, as we have already those which arise from the duties of *self-denial* and *bearing the cross.*

It is a prejudice which affects both the enemies and the friends of religion, at least some of them. As to the man who hath a secret dislike to what is serious and good, he is glad to avail himself of every circumstance, which may seem to justify his

a 2 Cor. xii. 10.

infidelity and disobedience. With warmth, therefore, and it may be an air of triumph, he puts in his exceptions to this command, as too refined and spiritual ever to become practicable. "You tell me, that all my objections to *self-denial* are vain; for that it is a duty which very well consists with a reasonable love of myself. And in like manner, that the offence I have been apt to take at *the cross* is groundless; for that the bearing it very well consists with a prudent concern for my temporal interests. Be it so. Yet *to follow Christ*, that is, to come up to that perfection of character which he is said to have possessed, is what no man is capable of in the present life. It is therfore vain to attempt it." And then, on the other hand, as to the serious dejected Christian, though he is struck with the excellencies of Christ, and sincerely aims to copy after them; yet he hath, perhaps through weakness, fixed the standard of religion so high, and is at the same time so deeply sensible of his own defects and imperfections, that he can scarcely allow himself to be a disciple of Jesus. "I would fain resemble my Master. But ah! his likeness is so imperfectly drawn out on my temper and life, that I fear it will be presumption in me to rank among his followers." Now, in order to obviate this objection, it is to be observed,

1. That perfection, in the strictest sense of it, is not required of a disciple of Christ. The expression we do indeed often meet with in the Bible. Abraham is commanded *to walk before God and be perfect a.* Our Saviour exhorts his disciples *to be perfect, even as their Father in heaven is perfect b.* And the apostles, with great earnestness, press us *to go on unto perfection c.* Nay, one of them declares, that *he who is born of God sinneth not d.* But it would argue either very great weakness or perverseness, to infer from such expressions, the necessity of an absolute freedom from all impure mixtures in the present life. For this is an attainment so impossible in its own nature, so contrary to the experience of the most eminent Christians, and so entirely inconsistent with the vicissitude, trial and affliction which attend them through this world, that no sober considerate man can imagine a book divinely inspired would affirm it to be necessary.

a Gen. xvii. 2. *b* Matt. v. 48. *c* Heb. vi. 1. *d* 1 John v. 18.

Nay, it asserts the direct contrary. *If we say that we have no sin we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us a.* Nor does it exhibit any one character to our view, except it be that of our Lord Jesus Christ, without apprising us of its imperfections as well as its excellencies. Is Abraham applauded for his faith, Job for his patience, or Moses for his meekness? their mistakes are also faithfully reported, and even their failures in those very graces for which they were so much renowned. And he who reads the history of the New Testament, will see many blemishes in the characters of the apostles; whilst he is obliged to acknowledge them, upon the whole, men of strict integrity and exalted piety. And then as to Christ, though his character hath no defect in it, and it is unquestionably our duty to imitate it; yet our being required to follow him, does not oblige us to an exact resemblance of him, but only to use our utmost endeavours to that end.

But it will be said, "Though absolute perfection is not expected in the present life; yet our Lord requires such an imitation of his example, as carries the idea of religion to a height of purity and spirituality which is scarcely attainable, or however, not without the greatest difficulty." It is therefore farther to be observed,

2. That the *following Christ* supposes, a principle of religion already implanted in the heart; and hath connected with it, the promise of all needful influences from above, to aid us in our duty. To a carnal heart, a heart wholly under the dominion of sin, the lessons which Christ teaches may seem too hard to be learned, and the precepts he enjoins, too severe and difficult to be obeyed. Nay, to the Christian himself, under certain circumstances, they may seem almost impracticable. But surely where there is a firm faith of the great realities of religion, a fixed abhorrence of sin, a sincere love of God, and a taste for the refined pleasures of devotion; the commands of Christ, even in their utmost latitude, will appear truly excellent and desirable.

With what an eager gust of affection does the psalmist utter these words, *O that my ways were directed to keep thy statutes b!* The tender feelings of that amiable woman Ruth, for

a 1 John i. 8. b Psal. cxix. 5.

her mother Naomi, rendered the idea of following her, how painful soever on some accounts, easy and pleasant. She was not discouraged, as her sister Orpah seems to have been, by the sad thought of leaving her native country, and sharing with this poor destitute widow, in her future hard fortunes. *His commands*, said the beloved disciple of Jesus, whose heart was impregnated with an unconquerable affection for his divine Master, *are not grievous a.* You see then a principle of religion will greatly facilitate our obedience, and so take off the edge of the objection.

And then farther, the promise of divine aids to assist him in his course of duty, tends mightily to attenuate and soften many circumstances, which to the Christian himself may sometimes appear hard and difficult. There are certain seasons in which, either through temptation, dejection of mind, or weakness of animal nature, insuperable discouragements seem to lie in the way of his following Christ. He knows not how to think of deserting his Master, yet to keep close to him is, in his sad apprehension, when thus beclouded with perplexing doubts and fears, almost impossible. But be these discouragements what they may, he who hath required us to follow him, hath sufficiently provided against them all, as we shall see more fully in the next discourse. *My grace is sufficient for thee b. As thy days, thy strength shall be c.* And after all it is to be remembered,

3. That our highest attainments in religion are not the matter of our justification before God. This I the rather mention, because it seems to me a consideration of great moment, when rightly understood and applied, to relieve us of slavish fears, and to remove an objection which hath no small force to intimidate us from following Christ. If our Saviour had put the issue of our salvation upon our rendering an exact and perfect obedience to the law of God, the ground on which the covenant of works originally stood; it had been a vain thing to think of being his disciple, because such an obedience, as we have already seen, is absolutely impracticable. No; the honours of the divine law and government are fully vindicated and maintained, by the sacrifice and righteousness of Christ. So that mercy,

a 1 John v. 3. b 2 Cor. xii. 9. c Deut. xxxiii. 25.

with all the consequent blessings of it, is extended towards sinners, in a way perfectly consistent with justice and truth.

Which being the case, it follows, that we have no cause to be discouraged in our religious pursuits, by a deep sense of our numerous follies and imperfections. For *if any man sin*, errs from his duty, through temptation, and bitterly laments it before God, let him remember, *we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous a.* And yet this idea of our acceptance with God, through the righteousness of Christ alone, which the apostle explains and defends at large, in his epistle to the Romans *b*, very well consists with the necessity of personal character, or inherent holiness, and is indeed the most noble and powerful motive to excite us to obedience.

Thus have I endeavoured to combat the objections, which are usually urged against this command of Christ. Which leads me now more particularly to illustrate the command itself. *To follow Christ* then, is,

1. To submit ourselves entirely to his guidance and direction. He hath undertaken to shew us the path to heaven; and he is every way equal to it, having a perfect knowledge of his Father's will, and a hearty affection to our interests. Many who have taken upon them to be the guides of others, have turned out weak and fallible, and some of them crafty and designing men. So that the unhappy multitude, who have implicitly intrusted them with their understandings and consciences, have been quickly betrayed into errors and practices of the most pernicious tendency. And the blind becoming thus the leaders of the blind, it is not to be wondered that they have both fallen into the pit. But this is not the case here. Christ hath claimed the character of a teacher come from God, assuring us that 'all things are delivered to him of the Father,' that he is authorised 'to reveal him to whomsoever he will *c*,' that he is 'the way, the truth, and the life,' and that 'no man cometh to the Father, but by him *d*.' This claim he hath supported, not only by the sublimity and excellence of his doctrine, and the purity and exemplariness of his life, but by a series of incontestible miracles. Moses hath borne witness to him as

a 1 John ii. 1.
b Rom. iii. 20—28. v. 15—21.
c Matt. xi. 27.
d John xiv. 6.

the true prophet, commanding us *to hear him in all things a*. And God himself hath declared by a voice from heaven, that he is *well pleased with him*, solemnly requiring us to be obedient to his instructions *b*. So that he is an infallible guide, not capable of erring himself, through ignorance, prejudice or passion; nor yet of leading others astray, through ill-will or disaffection to them, or through any unworthy or self-interested views of his own.

Now *to follow him*, is to submit ourselves entirely, and without the least doubt or hesitation, to his instructions; just as a traveller, who, passing through a country he is a perfect stranger to, puts himself under the conduct of his guide, in whose integrity and knowledge of the way he implicitly confides. Fully persuaded of the divinity of our Lord's mission, we are meekly to receive his doctrine, not daring to dispute matters with him, or when he tells us *this* is the way, obstinately to insist upon it that *that* is better. And since it is natural to suppose, he may tell us some things difficult to be comprehended, though by no means absurd or contradictory, and others which may clash with our perverse inclinations; it is absolutely necessary, as I have before shewn, that we resolutely mortify and subdue the pride of our depraved understandings, the prejudices of our stubborn wills, and the predilections of our vain and worldly hearts. We must not *confer with flesh and blood*, but consent to have our thoughts and reasonings brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. It must be a fixed point with us to yield to him in every matter, even the minutest, which, from a careful examination of the authentic records he hath left us, appear clearly to us to be his mind and will. To him we must say, as the Israelites did to Moses, *Speak thou unto us all that the Lord our God shall speak unto thee, and we will hear it c*. This is what the apostles style the *obedience of faith*; and all this enters into the idea of following Christ.

And as there is the highest reason, so there is the greatest satisfaction and pleasure in thus following him. For hereby the mind is relieved of those many perplexities, with which it is unavoidably entangled, while it hath no other guide to conduct

a Deut. xviii. 18, 19. b Matt. xvii. 15. c Deut. v. 27.

it through the mazes of this life, but the dim light of nature, or the uncertain reasonings of weak and fallible men. Again,

2. *To follow Christ* is to make a public profession of his religion. This, upon a general view of things, and as matters are now circumstanced among us, may seem no very great hardship. For the case with us at present, is widely different from what it was in primitive times. The civil power was then on the side of infidelity, and few dared to profess themselves the disciples of Jesus, without the utmost hazard to their persons and fortunes. Whence it followed, that a public avowal of the Christian name, was of itself a sufficient proof of a man's sincerity; and the apostles with good reason affirmed, that whoever *called Jesus Lord*, and *confessed that Christ is come in the flesh, was of God a.* But now the Christian religion is established by public authority; so that to be a Christian, in the common acceptation of that character, is no other than to fall in with the opinion and profession of the bulk of mankind, or however of the country wherein we live. And this can never subject us to any kind of worldly inconvenience.

But if we consider well, what is the leading doctrine of the New Testament, that which distinguishes the gospel from every other system of religion, and hath the main influence in forming the character, and giving life and vigour to the obedience of a real Christian; and if we farther consider what is the true nature and intent of the positive institutions of Christ, we shall find, that to follow him, that is, to profess the one, and duly to practise the others, will require a simplicity of heart, and firmness of mind, which I fear few, comparatively speaking, possess.

No one can be a true disciple of Christ, who is not disposed, with all becoming humility, to acknowledge himself a miserable helpless sinner, and to ascribe his hope of eternal salvation, to the mercy of God, through the mediation, sacrifice, and righteousness of Christ alone. But it is easy to see, that such a cordial subjection to Christ, as our only Saviour, will have no inconsiderable difficulties to struggle with. It will meet with opposition, and with very powerful opposition, in some instances, from the proud and false reasonings of the human heart, and from the strong prepossessions we all naturally feel in fa-

a 1 Cor. xii. 3.—1 John iv. 2.

vour of ourselves, and of certain good qualities, by which we imagine we stand distinguished from others. And then an open profession of these our regards to Christ, amidst the violent, though unreasonable prejudices of many against the gospel, will be likely to draw upon us the contempt, if not abuse, of such persons. Thus, however, it behoves us to follow Christ, in the face of the greatest opposition; to consider his religion as our highest glory; and to be ever ready zealously to maintain and defend it. *I am not ashamed*, said the apostle, *of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation, to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek a. God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world b.* And again, *Doubtless I count all things but loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, and be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith c.*

A due regard also to the positive institutions of Christ, as well as this general profession of his doctrine, is included in the idea of following him. Convinced of the truth of his religion, and endued, in our measure, with the real spirit of it, we are to put on Christ by baptism. So *it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness*, as he himself expresses it, when he descended into the watery tomb, and was therein baptized of John. An institution this, by which, in obedience to his authority, we declare our faith in his death and resurrection, and our resolution henceforth, in a dependence on his grace, to walk in newness of life. Thus initiated into the service of our divine Master, we are to join ourselves to some society of Christians, that with them we may enjoy all those means of instruction, counsel, and reproof, which Christ hath appointed in his church; and particularly the sacred ordinance of the Lord's supper, a feast which he hath required his followers to observe, to the end of time, in commemoration of his death, and the blessed fruits which result from it. So the primitive Christians, having been

a Rom. i. 16. b Gal. vi. 14. c Phil. iii. 8, 9.

baptized, were added to the church, and *continued stedfastly in the apostles doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers* a.

Thus, by a faithful and regular attendance on all the duties of public worship, and, I may add, of family and private devotion too, we are *to follow Christ.* And whoever considers the true intent of these his institutions, after what manner he hath commanded us to observe them, and the indifference, if not contempt, in which they are held by too many who call themselves Christians; will see that not a little zeal and resolution is requisite to the character of a real disciple of Christ. Once more,

3. *To follow Christ* is to imitate his example. And indeed it is to little purpose, that we are warm advocates for his doctrine and institutions, if we are all the while estranged from his spirit and temper. Nay, if this be the case, we do but affront him, amidst our highest professions of zeal for his service. A more deformed and wretched character can scarcely be imagined, than that of a man whose head is filled with religious speculations, while his heart is devoted to his lusts; and who, at the very same time he hath the assurance to say to Christ, as the Pharisees did of old, *Master, thou teachest the way of God truly* b, is thus, in effect, taking measures to betray him. No. If we will be his real disciples, while we acknowledge him as our guide, and confide in him as our Saviour, we must resolve to copy after him as our pattern. And a most bright and perfect pattern it is which he hath set us. It is an example exhibited to our view, amidst all the weaknesses of humanity, and so is exactly suited to our condition. An example free from every imaginable defect, and so hath the authority of a command. And the example of a friend, to whom we are under the greatest obligation, and so hath in itself every possible motive of generosity and love to engage our imitation. Let us take a general view of it——

As to his *piety towards God*, it was truly noble and exalted. The most striking expressions of reverence, confidence, submission, devotion, and obedience, appeared in the whole of his conduct. He daily conversed with God, by his word and works, by prayer and praise, in his retirements, and in public and so-

a Acts ii. 42. b Matt. xxii. 16.

cial acts of worship. He carefully eyed the hand of God in every event, and improved all the occurrences of life to the great purposes of religion. The utmost abhorrence he ever expressed at all appearance of vice and sin, and the warmest affection and zeal for truth and holiness. In his Father's will, however contrary to his temporal interests, he cheerfully acquiesced; and in his faithfulness and goodness, amidst the darkest scenes of adversity, he firmly confided. In a word, the glory of God he pursued with unwearied ardour and resolution, though at the expence of his outward ease and happiness, and many times with little appearance of success.

As to *social duties*, need I tell you how prudently, uprightly and benevolently he acquitted himself, in the whole of his conduct towards mankind? Every character and relation of life he filled up, with the greatest propriety and exactness. Towards his parents he carried himself with all filial reverence, duty and affection. Towards his disciples and friends, with all sincerity, tenderness and fidelity. And towards his enemies with a patience and forbearance, and yet a sensibility and spirit, which exceed description. The strictest integrity and truth were stamped upon all his actions; and at the same time, prudence and discretion were tempered with all his native simplicity and plainness. He was ever respectful to his superiors, and condescending to those of low estate. Ever ready to redress the grievances of the oppressed, and to shew compassion and kindness to the afflicted. Ever meditating designs of general good, and ever vigorously carrying them into execution. His dress, his gesture, his familiar talk, his journeys from place to place, his public discourses, his miracles, in short, all the actions of his life, were uniformly directed to this one point, the doing good.

And then, his *temper and conduct in regard of himself*, were no less amiable and exemplary. In meekness and humility, temperance and sobriety, contentment and patience, spirituality and heavenly-mindedness, he shone with unrivalled lustre. Though conscious to himself that he possessed a perfection of wisdom and goodness, yet he was of a humble and lowly temper, and his carriage was free from all appearance of affectation and pride. Sensible as he was of the value and use of worldly en-

joyments, he had a sovereign contempt for them all, in comparison with the refined pleasures of religion. No offers of worldly wealth or grandeur could tempt him from his duty; nor could the extremities of poverty or want depress his spirits, or make him discontented and uneasy. Amidst the most violent storms of adversity, he stood calm and serene; and amidst the insults of his haughty and cruel enemies, he was unmoved by passion or anger. In a word, with the most unparalleled meekness and fortitude, and with the most constant affection for those in whose stead he suffered, he met the rage of devils, the frowns of justice, and the terrors of death itself. Such are the outlines of his character, the general expressions of his temper and conduct.

Now, *to follow him*, is to copy after this his perfect example. It is, *with respect to God*, to take pains to come at the knowledge of his will; to converse with him in holy duties, and by the various mediums of intercourse he hath appointed; to rely firmly on his faithfulness in adversity, and gratefully to acknowledge his goodness in prosperity; to avoid sin as the greatest evil, and to aim sincerely to please and glorify him. *As to men:* to follow Christ, is to conduct ourselves with prudence and circumspection, with integrity and truth, with charity and kindness: in every relation and character of life, and in all our dealings and concerns with one another. And *as to ourselves:* to follow him, is to be sober and temperate in the use of all our worldly enjoyments; to be humble and condescending, when elevated above others by our attainments and successes; to be meek and forgiving amidst our provocations to anger and resentment; to be contented with the things which we have, and patient under the afflictions which we suffer; to mingle cheerfulness with gravity; to make religion the grand object of our pursuit; and in a dependence on the grace of God, to persevere in our duty to the end.

High and noble attainments these, and which no mere man hath ever possessed in their utmost perfection! Nor can we expect to succeed in any of these instances of duty, without suffering many discouragements in the attempt. Satan, the world, and what is still more to be dreaded, our own foolish and corrupt hearts, will unite their utmost force to obstruct us in our

course. Yet, if we will be his disciples, it must be our resolution, amidst every discouragement and imperfection, to make it our aim thus *to follow Christ.*

And now, having considered the several duties enjoined in the text, and the difficulties, both real and imaginary, which attend them; let me ask, what man who duly weighs these things, and by the grace of God, enters into the spirit of them, can have any objection to the becoming a disciple of Jesus? His service is most reasonable, advantageous, and honourable. We have every imaginable consideration to engage us to enter upon it, and to animate us in it. His *yoke is easy, and* his *burden is light a.* Nay, more than this; his *ways are ways of pleasantness, and all* his *paths are peace b.* But I shall not enter on these things at present: they will be the subjects of the following discourses.

In the mean while let us examine ourselves, whether we are the disciples of Christ. Is it our concern, in the sense our Saviour is to be understood, *to deny* or please *ourselves? to take up the cross,* or to shun it? *to follow Christ,* or the world? These are interesting questions. It will be happy if we can make a favourable reply. Be the answer, however, what it may, God grant that henceforth we may be persuaded, by the alluring influence of divine grace, to make his service the object of our main attention, and most cheerful pursuit!

DISCOURSE VI.

THE DIFFICULTIES OF RELIGION SURMOUNTED.

MATT. XI. 36.—*For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.*

So spake the blessed Jesus in the days of his flesh, when he condescended himself, with his own kind lips, to publish the

a Matt. xi. 30. b Prov. iii. 17.

glad tidings of salvation. His ministry, it seems, had met with very ungrateful treatment, from those very cities wherein most of his mighty works were done. Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum had not repented of their sins, but obstinately persisted in unbelief. He rejoices, however, that there were those, even among the mean and illiterate, upon whom the blessings of religion were bestowed; and, acknowledging the distinguishing goodness of God herein, he adds, *Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight* a. Upon which he takes occasion, very explicitly, to assert his own character, and the important ends of his mission, that *all things were delivered unto him of his Father*, and that he was authorised *to reveal him*, and his grace *to whomsoever he would* b. Agreeable, therefore, to the commission he had received, he applies himself immediately to the duties of his prophetic character, earnestly entreating *all who labour and are heavy laden, to come to him, to take his yoke upon them*, and to submit to his instruction; assuring them at the same time, that *they shall find rest unto their souls* c. *For*, says he in the text, *my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.*

Some think our Saviour here refers to the ceremonial law; and that as he is speaking more immediately to Jews, he intends the advantage of an exemption from that law, which they would obtain by becoming his disciples. And certain it is, that the observation of those rites was a yoke, which neither they nor their fathers were able to bear, and from which Christ did at the proper time release his followers: wherefore, he might be justly said on this account, to have given them rest. And since the new dispensation he established in the room of it, is plain and familiar, and the institutions of it few and easy to be performed; his yoke might with good reason be styled an easy yoke. It is certain likewise, that the Pharisees and teachers of the law, did by their various traditions, unwarrantably add weight to the burden which Moses had laid upon the people. As therefore our Lord on all occasions, very freely exposed and condemned these iniquitous encroachments of ecclesiastical power, he might be properly said, in this respect also, to have given them rest. While at the same time, the burden he imposed on his disciples was light in comparison with theirs; since

a Ver. 26. b Ver. 27. c Ver. 28, 29.

what he required was in itself most fit and reasonable, however a compliance with it might expose them to some few temporary inconveniences.

But, though all this may be included in the text, it does not come up to the full sense of it. Something of still greater importance is intended. Our Lord had been lamenting the impenitence and irreligion of the generality of his hearers: and it is but natural to conclude from thence, that when he presently after invites men to come to him, and take his yoke upon them, he means to recommend the opposite temper and practice to that he had been deploring. Wherefore, by those who labour and are heavy laden, he must intend, not such only who were weary of Jewish ceremonies and traditions; but all those who are tired of the galling yoke of sin, and borne down with the guilt of it. "*Come unto me, and I will give you rest*, that is, believe in me, and I will set you free from the base servitude of your lusts, and from the dread you feel of the divine wrath. *Take my yoke upon you and learn of me*, that is, be my disciples and imitate my example, *for I am meek and lowly in heart*. And though my service be on some accounts *a yoke*, and though some disagreeable circumstances which attend it, *a burden*; yet that *yoke is easy*, that *burden is light*. Whatever I require of you is most reasonable, and my grace will render the performance of it not only practicable, but pleasant. It is an *easy* service, or *gracious a*, (as some render the word) not hard and severe, but mild and gentle. And as to suffering for my sake, which may be your lot, think it not a burden, or however be assured it is but a light burden; for I will give you strength to endure it, and will in the end reward your patience and love with a never-fading crown of glory."

What it is to be a Christian, or as our Lord here expresses it, to take his yoke upon us, I shall not stay particularly to shew. It hath been attempted at large in a former discourse. It is to believe in Christ as our Saviour and friend, and to submit to him as our Lord and sovereign. It is to rely upon his mediation and righteousness, for our acceptance with God, and to make his will the rule of our lives. It is to profess his doctrine, to conform to his institutions, and if he call us to it, to endure

sufferings for his sake. Now, it is acknowledged, considering the corruption of the human heart, the opposition of Satan, the intoxicating nature of worldly pleasures, the force of bad example, the contempt in which religion is held by the generality of mankind, and many other circumstances which might be mentioned; it is acknowledged, I say, considering these things, that no small difficulty and self-denial must attend the service of Christ.

Whatever, therefore, of this sort, the figures of *a yoke* and *a burden* may suggest, or can indeed with any reason be supposed, we will admit. Let imagination, yea even prejudice itself, magnify these difficulties, and set them in every possible light. Figure to yourselves the Christian, in the character of a soldier, contending with the powers of the world, and the prince of darkness, plunged in all the horrors of war, and fighting his way to heaven, through reproach, persecution, and death. Behold him wrestling with sin and sense, with the evil passions of his heart, and the irregular appetites of nature; by many painful struggles *bringing under his body*, and by reiterated blows, *keeping it in subjection a.* View him pressing on in the course of duty, with all the attention and eagerness of a racer; *reaching forth to the things which are before b*, straining every nerve, and aiming with unremitting ardour at the prize. In a word; suppose him for once, like his Master, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, clad in sackcloth and ashes, beset with sad and numerous temptations, and even denied, for a while, the enlivening presence of his God. Still it remains true, that *the yoke of Christ is easy, and his burden light.* Considerations there are, enough to balance every discouragement which hath been mentioned.

These considerations let me now lay before you, and then make some suitable improvement of the whole.

I. The service of Christ is *in itself highly reasonable.* What one thing hath he required of his disciples, which their judgment and conscience do not, upon the most deliberate reflections, approve, as most fit and becoming?

1. He hath commanded us, as hath been shewn in the former discourse, to *deny ourselves*, that is, to lay an absolute restraint

a 1 Cor. ix. 27. *b* Phil. iii. 13.

on all irregular passions and appetites, and to that end, to forego occasionally such gratifications as are in themselves lawful. And should not this be done? Is it not our duty, our interest to comply? Can we hesitate a moment upon the question, whether pride, avarice, lust, envy, malevolence, anger, and revenge, ought to be soothed and cherished in our breasts, or mortified and subdued? If they are in themselves evil, if they are contrary to the express command of God, and if they are hurtful to our own interests both here and hereafter, hath not Christ done right, and approved himself our real friend, in pressing this injunction upon us, however disagreeable to depraved nature? Had the reverse of this been the case, had he required us to give full scope to our corrupt inclinations, and to gratify them in every instance which offered; had he, for example, commanded us to be covetous, envious and revengeful, lewd, fierce and intemperate, should we not have had just cause to complain, that we were hardly dealt by?

And since the violence and turbulency of our passions, is scarcely to be subdued without the exercise of severe and prudent discipline, is it not highly reasonable, yea necessary on certain occasions, to preclude ourselves from pleasures, which are, in their own nature, innocent and good? If the soldier, eager to obtain the rewards of victory, must prepare himself for the toils and hardships of war, by a voluntary abstinence from the soft indulgences of sense, why should it be thought strange, that religion, which is no other than a warfare with our most dangerous enemies, should oblige the Christian to the like conduct? especially since his Master hath set him an example of self-denial, in regard of the innocent and desirable enjoyments of life, though he stood not in need of these exercises as we do, to prepare him for the work and duty he had undertaken. The pleasure likewise which attends every advantage gained over our spiritual enemies, and the animating prospect of that crown of life, which Christ hath promised to him who is faithful unto death, may well reconcile us to this part of his service, however difficult and painful. Again,

2. Christ hath commanded us to *take up our cross*, that is, to endure patiently whatever afflictions may befal us, especially those to which a profession of religion may expose us. From

the common infirmities and troubles of life, we have surely no reason to expect the Christian character should secure us. A quiet submission, therefore, to them, is equally a dictate of nature and religion. And as to those of an inward or spiritual kind, they are no just occasions of offence at the service of Christ, since they are not owing to that cause, but to others of quite a different nature, that is, to gloominess of constitution, to unbelief, to the conflict which we are necessarily obliged to maintain with our lusts, or to the withdrawment of the divine presence, which is the effect of sin, and is designed also as a mean to promote our real good. These crosses, therefore, it is most reasonable we should bear. And then, as to the troubles in which a faithful attachment to truth, to conscience, and to the interest of Christ, may occasionally involve us, and which is what our Saviour chiefly intends, these owe their existence, as hath been shewn, to the malice of Satan, and the malevolence of wicked men, and they are over-ruled by Providence, to answer very wise and important purposes.

It is, therefore, by no means strange, that a disciple of Christ is required to take up his cross. It is fit he should. It is his duty. It is, upon the whole, his interest. Does not reason teach, that a lesser advantage should be foregone, when it stands in the way of a greater? and that as to suffering, it is better, as our Saviour expresses it, *that one of the members should perish, than that the whole body should be cast into hell a?* And though it may seem a violation of the law of nature, to expose ourselves to poverty, reproach, and death, when it is in our power to escape those evils, yet when the duty we owe to God, our obligations to the Lord Jesus Christ, and our own most important interests in another world are at stake, it were surely the most extravagant madness and folly, to secure to ourselves outward ease and happiness, yea even life itself, at so prodigious an expence.

But, when we take into view, the supports and comforts promised to the suffering Christian, and the rewards of unutterable bliss and glory laid up for him in heaven, the cross surely is rather to be coveted than shunned. *Verily I say unto you,* is the language of Christ to all his persecuted disciples, *there is no man who hath left house, or parents, or brethren, or wife, or*

a Matt. v. 29.

children, for the kingdom of God's sake, who shall not receive manifold more in this present time, and in the world to come life everlasting a. And with all this light and splendour around us, we well know how to account for those otherwise strange passages of Scripture, wherein we read of the primitive Christians, *glorying in tribulation b.* To take up the cross then, is a most reasonable precept. And so likewise is that precept,

3. Of *following Christ*, that is, learning of him, and aiming at a perfect conformity to his will and example. Can it be questioned, whether we ought implicitly to receive *his* doctrine, who brings with him such clear and incontestible proofs of a divine mission? Or whether we should cheerfully accept of mercy at *his* hands, since in this way it is so honourable to God, and so infinitely beneficial to ourselves? Can it be questioned, whether so fair a pattern as that he hath set before us, ought to be copied; a pattern, which, though we cannot fully come up to it, yet charms the heart of every attentive and truly serious beholder? Will any one say, that Christ is an unreasonable or hard Master, in requiring us to cultivate humility, contentment, patience, meekness, and love, to seek the good of our fellow-creatures, to make the glory of God the scope of our actions, and to consider the divine favour as our chief and ultimate felicity?

In like manner, is there any just ground to find fault with the institutions of Christ, as being either tedious or trifling? The forms he hath prescribed are plain and easy, the signs natural and expressive, and the temper of the heart such exactly as is suited to our condition as sinners, and to the unparalleled condescensions of his grace as our Saviour. Even a Jew, though the rites of that dispensation were numerous, expensive and burdensome, had no cause, upon the whole, to dispute the wisdom and goodness of the great Legislator. How much less reason then have we to complain, who are not solemnly required, at the peril of our lives, to bring up our flocks and herds to the altar of the Lord; but are sweetly allured and persuaded, to *present* our hearts *unto God a living sacrifice, holy and accept-*

a Luke xviii. 29, 30. b Rom. v. 3.

able, through Jesus Christ a! The service, then, is in itself most reasonable. Whence, let us now proceed to consider,

II. Our unspeakable obligations to him who hath demanded this service of us.

The fitness of any service is itself a sufficient reason for our compliance. But if it be required of us by a wise man, a good man, a man of eminence, a friend, a relation, a brother, a parent, our obligations to obedience will be hereby greatly heightened and increased. The very idea of the character which imposes it, will soften what might otherwise be deemed an imposition, and give it the pleasing denomination of a favour, a privilege, an honour. Such is the case with respect to the yoke of religion. It is itself easy, and more than this, it is not forced on our necks by the severe and rigorous arm of tyranny and oppression, or of ignorance and superstition; but by the kind and gentle hand of him, to whom we are infinitely obliged, and who is *full of grace and truth b.* It is the yoke of Christ, of him who made us, who upholds us in our existence, who gave his life for us: of him, whose authority, wisdom and goodness stand confirmed by unquestionable evidence.

Behold, Christian, the adorable Saviour! Survey the beauties of his countenance, contemplate the grace of his heart, reflect on the bounty of his hands! And then say, whether the commands his lips pronounce, can ever sound harsh in your ears, or ever be ungrateful to your inclinations. What, O what hath he done for you? rather should I say, What hath he not done for you? In all your guilt and misery he saw you, he pitied you, he ran to your relief. The bliss and glory he possessed in heaven could not detain him there, such was his love! —when your redemption made it necessary for him to descend thence. No, nor could the direful agonies he had in prospect, shake his resolution, or hold him back from the great undertaking. He bowed his willing neck, and patiently, yea cheerfully, for your sake, took the yoke of human nature on him, with all its sinless infirmities. He was *made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem* you from the curse of the law, and to entitle you to *the adoption of sons c.* On him was laid the heavy burden of your iniquities, and of the sons of the mighty there was

a Rom. xii. 1. b John i. 14. c Gal. iv. 4, 5.

not one, either able or willing, to help him. He bore your griefs, he carried your sorrows. 'He pleased not himself, but as it is written, the reproaches of them that reproached thee, fell on me *a*.' For you he lived, for you he died, for you he rose again. For you he now lives in heaven, to shower innumerable blessings upon you in your way through this world, and to prepare mansions of glory for you, against your arrival at that blissful state.

And can you, after all the evidence you have of his dignity and glory, dispute his authority to lay this yoke upon you? Or, after all the proofs he hath given of his mildness and love, hesitate one moment, at your obligations, to submit to it? Is not he who requires you to hear and obey him, *the prophet whom the Lord your God hath raised up unto you b*, and *in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge c?* Is not he who demands your allegiance and subjection, the Prince who hath obtained your liberties for you, at the expence of his blood? A Master who hath too much gentleness in his nature to impose a hard service on you; and a Friend who loves you too well, to expect any other office at your hands, but what reason dictates, and gratitude approves? In a word, is he not that righteous Judge, who will, of his infinite grace, reward all your labour of love in another world with a crown of unfading glory?

And now say, whether these considerations, when impressed upon the heart by a lively faith, accompanied with a divine influence, may not well render *the yoke of Christ easy, and his burden light.*

PART II.

As a farther motive to animate us to our duty, it is to be remembered,

III. That when Christ invites men into his service, he means not to leave them to their own strength.

They who enter the lists with sin and sense, under the banner of Jesus, the great Captain of salvation, shall not fail to be supported by him in the heat of the battle. His power is almighty, and he hath promised it shall rest upon them. *My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in*

a Rom. xv. 3. *b* Deut. xviii. 15. *c* Col. ii. 3.

weakness a. Blessed promise! If it were not for this, how soon should we faint and tire in the path of duty! how soon should we yield to the power and rage of the enemy! how soon should we sink under the weight of our own fears! Difficult it is indeed to subdue corruptions, which, resisting all the reasonings of philosophy, have obstinately triumphed over mankind. But *through Christ who strengtheneth us, we can do all things b.* Difficult it is to make a bold stand against the world, its snares and temptations, its passions and prejudices. But having him on our side, who hath said, *Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world c,* the conquest will, it must be easy. Difficult it is, in a word, to support the heavy weight of affliction, which Providence sometimes judges it necessary to lay upon us; and especially *to resist unto blood,* in the cause of truth and religion. But can it be imagined, that the merciful Saviour will call men to suffer for his sake, and when he has done so, desert them in the hour of trial? Have not some of the most timorous of his disciples, strengthened by his grace, approved themselves champions on these tremendous occasions? The habit, it is true, in which religion at such times appears, is by no means pleasing to an eye of sense. Nature starts back at the sight. The yoke seems hard, and the burden heavy. But faith, that grand principle of religion, when in its full strength, can counteract all the false reasonings of sense, and convince a man that it is his interest, in the face of every possible discouragement, to follow Christ.

I might here describe particularly, the various assistances afforded Christians in their duty, and the many seasonable supports vouchsafed them under their afflictions; though the subject is too copious to be fully discussed. When God in his providence appoints them to important and arduous services, he often surprises them with unexpected communications of divine grace. How amazingly are the powers of their minds, on some occasions especially, strengthened and enlarged! Their breasts steeled with an uncommon degree of fortitude, patience, and constancy! And their animal nature itself, rendered capable of enduring extraordinary pain, fatigue, and labour! So that, blessed with a large share of the comforts of religion, and fired with a generous

a 2 Cor. xii. 9. b Phil. iv. 13. c John xvi. 33.

zeal for the glory of God, and the good of mankind, we have seen them surmount the greatest difficulties in their course of duty, and perform wonders in the service of their divine Master. In like manner, as to afflictions; what an amazing flow of spirits have some Christians enjoyed, amidst the severest outward trials! What solid peace and satisfaction have they felt in their consciences! What firm confidence in the providence and grace of God! And what enlivening prospects of a future happy immortality! God has put underneath them his everlasting arms, and poured such consolation into their breasts, as have more than compensated all the pain and distress, attending their sharpest conflicts with sin and the world.

Nor are we without the noblest encouragements in the word of God, to expect such aids and supports in the service of Christ. What divine energy is there in these animating words, dictated by the love, and confirmed by the faithfulness of a God! *When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burnt; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee a. Fear thou not, for I am with thee: be not dismayed, for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee, yea I will help thee, yea I will uphold thee, with the right hand of my righteousness b.* Can faith hear such promises pronounced in its ears, without boldly saying, *The Lord is my helper c?* Did the three Jewish youths, who suffered so eminently in the cause of truth, judge the yoke of religion on this account to be severe, or its burden intolerable? *We are not careful,* say they to the tyrant, *to answer thee in this matter. If it be so, our God whom we serve, is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king. But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up d.* And what was the issue? when they passed through the midst of the fire, they had no hurt; for the Son of God, whose servants they were, was with them. Or did the apostles conceive any ill prejudices against the doctrine or service of their Master, because of the extraordinary trials of

a Isa. xliii. 2.
b Chap. xli. 10.
c Heb. xiii. 6.
d Dan. iii. 16—18.

an outward kind, to which their profession exposed them? *We are*, say they, *for his sake killed all the day long, and accounted as sheep for the slaughter*. Nevertheless, with what unaffected cheerfulness do they add, *In all these things, in tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, peril, sword, we are more than conquerors through him that loved us a*. Which leads me to observe,

IV. That this yoke, this burden has been borne by many who have gone before us; and having therefore been tried, it is plain it is not insupportable.

God has had a people firmly attached to his interests, and cheerfully disposed to his service, in every age from the very beginning. A few there were in the old world, who dared *to call upon the name of the Lord*, and at a time when the earth was as generally overwhelmed with infidelity and vice, as it afterwards was with the waters of the flood. There was an Enoch who *walked with God*, when all mankind were in confederacy against God; and a Noah who *preached righteousness*, when not one could be prevailed on to listen to his instructions. Nor do we find that either of them, uncommon as their difficulties were, fainted in the service of their divine Master, or even dropt a complaint, that it was too painful and arduous to be performed. The submission required of Abraham, when commanded to follow God into a strange land, and with his own hands to offer up his only son, one should have been ready to deem most severe and impracticable. But a firm faith in the promised Messiah, whose day he saw afar off, and the sight of which made him glad, softened his heart into an immediate compliance with the will of Heaven. Moses likewise, amidst all the wealth and gaiety of a splendid court, and all the alarming frowns of tyranny and persecution, cheerfully bowed his neck to the yoke of Christ, *choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; and esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he had respect unto the recompence of reward b*. Nor were there wanting innumerable instances, all through the times of the judges and the prophets, down to the happy pe-

a Rom. viii. 35—37. b Heb. xi. 25, 26.

riod in which Christ himself appeared; of persons, who, though they enjoyed not those distinguishing advantages of knowledge and instruction which we possess, yet having their hearts moulded into the spirit of the gospel, had resolution enough, in the face of the greatest opposition, to profess their faith in the expected Messiah.

And how it was during the time he sojourned here on earth, sacred history sufficiently shews. Every imaginable discouragement attended his service, arising from the poverty of his appearance, the general prejudices which prevailed against him, and the imperfect apprehensions which were formed of his doctrine; yet there were a few who faithfully adhered to him amidst all these difficulties. And though the clearer light of divine truth, which afterwards irradiated the minds of these few disciples, did not disperse but rather increase that storm of persecution, which had been gathering over their heads; yet their number multiplied exceedingly. So, that what is commonly accounted the most burdensome and painful part of Christ's service, I mean suffering, was, by the generality of Christians, coveted as their highest honour, and gloried in as their brightest crown. So readily did they assent to the truth of what their Master had assured them, that 'his yoke is easy, and his burden light!' And witnesses without number have arisen, in every age and country where the gospel has been preached since that time, to authenticate this sacred declaration.

But why need we go from home to collect evidence upon this point? Let every man say, who has felt the power and tasted the sweetness of religion (and surely there are yet some such among us), whether the words of Jesus have not been sufficiently verified in his own experience? They are true; every serious Christian will affirm them so, whatever painful struggles the remains of sin may daily occasion within, or whatever cruel opposition he may endure from a wicked world without.—The yoke then is tolerable, since it has, and still is borne by many, not with patience only, but cheerfulness and pleasure. It is also to be observed,

V. In reference at least to some of the duties and sufferings required of a Christian, that hard as this yoke may at first seem, yet being used, it will become more easy.

I am sensible that it is not one good action or the repetition of it, which will constitute a man a real Christian, that is, give him a new nature, or make that pleasing to him from which he was before entirely averse. Yet it is easy to conceive, how the frequent exercise of a principle of religion already implanted in the heart, may tend to confirm that principle; and of consequence how the duty or service to which it impels us, may become more and more agreeable. It stands to reason, that whatever bodily labour, fatigue or suffering, may attend the discharge of any duty, it must by use be considerably lessened, if not entirely removed. For in regard of all these external circumstances, the case is much the same in matters of religion, as in the common business and concerns of life *a*.

Let us put the case of one newly converted, and who hath formerly run great lengths in sin. The small degree of knowledge and experience which such a person possesses, the powerful opposition he meets with from temptation and evil example, his long custom in sinning, and the fears which through various causes are apt to arise in his breast; are all circumstances, which may very naturally be supposed to render some at least of the duties and services required of him, peculiarly arduous and painful. If indeed it be said, that the early dawn of the divine life is usually distinguished by the sprightliness and vigour of it; it is to be replied, that this is chiefly owing to the extraordinary flow of zeal and affection peculiar to that period: and therefore does not prove, that the young convert has fewer difficulties to contend with in the beginning, than afterwards. This then being admitted, it is but natural to conclude, that as his views enlarge, and faith takes deeper root in his heart, he will find the path of duty, though still strewed with its difficulties, become more and more easy. And this account of the matter is sufficiently countenanced by various passages of Scripture.

You know how the apostle John ranks the disciples of Christ, in the different classes of *little children*, and *young men*; addressing the former of these characters with all the tenderness suited to the feeble state of infancy, and congratulating the latter

a It was Pythagoras's advice to his scholars: "Optimum vitæ genus eligito, nam consuetudo faciet jucundissimum."

upon the mighty victory they had obtained, through the superior strength with which they were endowed, over the rage and malice of a wicked world *a*. Nor can we forget how the author to the Hebrews describes some Christians, as mere *babes*, in regard both of their weakness and inexperience, nourished only *with milk*, and *unskilful in the word of righteousness*; while he represents those of longer standing in the church of God, as men fed *with strong meat*, and *having, by reason of use, their senses exercised to discern both good and evil b*. From all which it seems natural to infer, that though they are both the happy subjects of the grace of God, yet that the yoke of duty and suffering must, for the most part, be more tolerable to him who is accustomed to it, than to him who hath but newly submitted to it.

This consideration, therefore, should have a farther influence to reconcile the young Christian to the many difficulties which assault him, at his first entrance on the ways of religion. To conclude,

VI. And lastly, Suppose the yoke of Christ ever so grievous, it is nevertheless easy in comparison with the yoke of sin.

And of the truth of this, it will be readily allowed, that they who have made trial of the one and the other, are very competent judges. To the sentence, however, of wicked men themselves, we may, upon a fair representation of the matter, appeal. And the verdict of their reason and conscience, we have no room to doubt, will be given in favour of religion; even though the bias of their corrupt and perverse inclinations, lies directly the other way. Say then, you who *yield yourselves servants to unrighteousness*, is there any yoke so galling, any servitude so base, as that of sin? The prince you bow your knee to is more despotic and tyrannical, than ever was the haughty Pharaoh: and the masters you serve are far more severe and cruel in their demands than were the Egyptian task-masters. They *chastised* the Israelites *with whips*; but these are not content without scourging your consciences *with scorpions*. What are the wages you receive at the hands of sin and Satan? Not such as you have fondly expected, real, substantial and abiding pleasure, but shame, misery and death. Follow yourselves through the

a 1 John ii. 13, 14. *b* Heb. v. 13, 14.

drudgery of vice and sin, and say whether the poor brutal gratification of a moment, accompanied with satiety and disappointment, and attended with the most bitter remorse, and the most painful reflections, whether this be a reward adequate to all your toils and labours.

How easy then, when compared with this yoke, is that which the merciful Jesus has framed, which his kind hand lays upon the neck of his disciples, and which, by the influence of his good Spirit, he enables them to bear? Be it so, that it is irksome to the flesh, yet it is not galling to the conscience. Be it so, that a vain and foolish world have branded it with infamy and reproach, yet in the account of God, and of all wise men, it is truly becoming and honourable. Be it so, that it subjects the Christian to outward inconvenience and trouble, and that by reason of the remains of sin, it occasions him many grievous conflicts within, yet Scripture and experience testify, that it is most friendly, both to his present, and his future, and everlasting interests.

Now all these things considered—the reasonableness of Christ's service—the obligations his grace hath laid upon us—the strength he promises us—the example of those gone before us—the advantage arising from improving experience—and the easiness of the yoke of Christ, when compared with that of Satan—It follows, that the difficulties attending religion, are not so great as sin and sense would represent them. And thus is our Saviour's assertion in the text, I hope, fully and satisfactorily established, *My yoke is easy, and my burden is light.*

PART III.

THE reasonableness of Christ's service, and the encouragements he hath given us, amidst all the difficulties which attend it, we have considered at large. And it now remains that we make some suitable improvement of the subject.

FIRST, If the yoke of Christ is so very easy as hath been represented, how is it that men are generally prejudiced against it?

Some indeed will say, that they have their doubts as to the truth of our Saviour's mission and doctrine; and that therefore it is not to be wondered at, that they do not become his disciples. To dispute matters with unbelievers is not my business

here. Their objections are, for the most part, frivolous and vain; and there is not one of them but hath, by various writers, been fully and plainly refuted. So that without breach of charity it may be affirmed, that the opposition which Christianity meets with in the world, owes its existence more to the disaffection of men's hearts to the gospel itself, than to their conscientious scruples about the evidence of it. They have a secret and prevailing dislike to the spirit of this divine institution, and a bitter and obstinate aversion to its sacred precepts and injunctions. And if they did but deal honestly by themselves and others, they would acknowledge that the matter lies here—Christ's *sayings* are, in the apprehension of their depraved nature, *hard*, and so *they cannot hear them a.*

But you have seen that what he requires of his disciples is most fit and reasonable in itself, and most salutary and beneficial in its tendency. His commands will endure the strictest scrutiny. Let them all be brought forth to the light, and tried by every possible medium, which impartial reason can suggest. Let his most determined enemies ask themselves this plain question, Whether, admitting that Christ is infinitely wise and good, he could have done any other, than require his disciples, *to deny themselves, to take up their cross, and to follow him?* Or whether, if the matter were reversed, he would not have given a clear and undeniable proof, that his pretensions to a divine mission were false and groundless. What should we have thought of him, had he pressed it upon us, as our incumbent duty, to throw the reins upon the neck of our inclinations and passions, to allow ourselves in every vain pursuit, and carnal gratification we are capable of? To renounce truth and conscience, and all that is held sacred among men, rather than endure a few temporal evils and sufferings? And to follow the principles, customs and manners of the world, in preference to an institution, which hath the evident marks of divine authority upon it? Would this, I say, have been wise and good? The powers of darkness might indeed have applauded such counsel; and while men greedily fell in with it, they would no doubt have malevolently triumphed in their present and everlasting ruin.

a John vi. 60.

But he *who came to seek and to save that which was lost*, preaches another kind of doctrine; a doctrine which is holy, just and good, and which unites the glory of God, and the real interests of his disciples, in one point. And while he appeals to the judgments and consciences of his followers, for the excellence and utility of his precepts, gives the fullest proof of the disinterested and tender compassion of his heart, by himself bearing the cross before them, and pouring out his life thereon for their sakes. Amazing goodness! How worthy is he to be loved and obeyed, by all who have any sense of duty, gratitude and interest!

But from whence do these sad and fatal prejudices against Christ and his service proceed? They spring from that one grand source of all the miseries which this world suffers, *the corruption of human nature*. Let any one sit down, and impartially consider our Saviour's character and doctrine on the one hand, and the violent antipathy there is in most men to religion on the other; and he cannot fail, methinks, readily to fall in with the Scripture account of the apostacy of mankind, and the dreadful consequences which have followed upon it. Both prophets and apostles speak one language, *The whole world is become guilty before God. They are all under sin. There is none righteous, no not one. There is none that understandeth, none that seeketh after God a.*

And now, Sirs, if you have any conviction impressed upon your judgments and consciences of the truth of what our Saviour affirms in the text, let me entreat you,

1. To enter into a close and serious consideration of this sad source of all your prejudices against Christ. You acknowledge them to be unreasonable. And since they are evidently the fruit of a vitiated imagination and a depraved will, it is fit you should be sensible of the diseased state you are in. *The whole need not a physician, but they that are sick b.* Wherefore, be persuaded to converse much with your own hearts; to observe attentively the bent and tenor of your desires and affections; and to consider well how all the false reasonings of your minds tend to one point, the gratification of your depraved inclinations. Compare this view of your own hearts, with the

a Rom. iii. 9—11. b Matt. ix. 12.

lively representations given of them in the sacred Scriptures. Think much of the deformity and wretchedness of your condition. Be convinced of the necessity of a renovation of your nature, in order to your real happiness. Christ says to you, as well as to Nicodemus, *Ye must be born again a.* And the apostle assures you, that *they who are in the flesh cannot please God b.* Let it also be remembered, that the more deeply you are sensible of the obstinacy of your disease, the more clearly will you perceive the suitableness and efficacy of that remedy which divine grace hath provided.

2. Since all these prejudices, which I have endeavoured to expose, are sinful and groundless, take heed how you indulge or cherish them. Men would not be at so much pains to fix the charge of unreasonableness and severity upon religion, if they did not secretly hope hereby to get rid of that strong presumption in favour of its truth, which disturbs and galls their consciences. That is their object. And it is possible, that by an eager attention to the suggestions of their own corrupt hearts, and of wicked and profane men with whom they converse; they may, after a while, come to believe, that religion is all a dream. And the effect of this will be a total insensibility. There will remain no sentiment or feeling, capable of being addressed or expostulated with. And can you conceive of a more dangerous state of the mind than this? As you dread, therefore, the being thus hardened in infidelity and sin, beware how you countenance those prejudices and objections, which have this direct and manifest tendency. Be on your guard against them. And whether they are started by your own perverted imagination, or are thrown in your way by Satan and his emissaries, who would gladly retain you in the service of sin; do your utmost to stifle them in the birth, or oppose to them those reasonings which you have heard, and which in your judgment and conscience you acknowledge to be sound and good. Again,

3. Pray mightily to God, to subdue your stubborn will, and to conciliate your hearts and affections to his service. If you are fully persuaded that it is your interest to become the disciples of Christ, this persuasion, in proportion to the strength of it,

a John iii. 7. b Rom. viii. 8.

will put vigour and energy into your prayers. And the opposition it may meet with from carnal affections, and worldly attachments, will serve to convince you more and more of your own weakness, and of the need you stand in of the influences of the blessed Spirit. Make it therefore your earnest request to God, to impress upon your minds a lively sense of the truth, excellence and importance of those great discoveries the gospel makes; to lay open to your view the deceitful reasonings of your hearts; to subdue effectually your stubborn prejudices; and to incline you to a cordial and cheerful compliance with the divine will. Fast bound as Simon was in the chains of iniquity, Peter exhorts him *to repent and pray God, if perhaps the thought of his heart might be forgiven him a.* And our Lord himself counsels the Laodiceans, intoxicated as they were with worldly pleasures and pursuits, *to buy of him gold tried in the fire, that they might be rich; and white raiment that they might be clothed, and that the shame of their nakedness might not appear; and to anoint their eyes with eye-salve, that they might see b.* O may this counsel of his find access to your hearts! So will you acknowledge, from your own experience, not only that *his yoke is easy, and his burden light,* but that *his ways are ways of pleasantness, and all his paths are peace c.*

Secondly, From what hath been said, we see the strong obligations which all those are under, whose hearts are well affected to the service of Christ, to make a public profession of his name. It is his express language, *Take my yoke upon you d.*

Religion is, I know, a personal thing, a matter which lies between God and our own souls. Yet as there must, there will be many external expressions of it: so this which I here mention, is of no small importance. They who believe the doctrine of Christ, ought most certainly to profess it: and they who have entered into the spirit of the gospel, ought to be found in the practice of its institutions. There are many powerful motives to excite you, Sirs, to this duty: but it may be there are considerations of no small weight on the other hand, which hold you back from it. Let me therefore attempt to set

a Acts viii. 22. b Rev. iii. 18. c Prov. iii. 17. d Ver. 29.

them both in their proper light. Your principal difficulty is, perhaps,

1. The want of a full and clear satisfaction as to your uprightness towards God. A considerable difficulty this doubtless is.

As to those who would fain persuade themselves that they are men of God, amidst many sad and strong presumptions that they are men of the world, the best advice that can be given them, is to forbear taking all this pains to their own real prejudice. There is in such cases little occasion for suspicion. The matter is too clear. Wherefore, their business is to reflect on the misery of their condition, and to consider immediately how it is to be escaped *a*.

But I am here addressing myself to persons of a different complexion, the truly serious, but timorous, disciples of Christ. And as to such, it may be naturally enquired, What kind of satisfaction do you wish to have, or do you judge necessary, to entitle you to the institutions of Christ? Absolute perfection is not necessary, nor is it attainable in the present life, as you have already seen. And as to a certain assurance of your future happy state, however desirable that may be, it is not requisite to denominate you a good man. Besides, it is in the use of those means of religion, which Christ hath appointed, and to which I would persuade you, that such an assurance is only with reason to be expected.

Now the matter upon which you wish to obtain satisfaction, is reducible to these two questions, What it is that constitutes a man a real Christian? and, whether you answer to that character? Upon the former question you are to be determined by Scripture. And Scripture clearly teaches, that he, and he only, is a genuine disciple of Christ, who believes the record which God hath given of his Son; and, convinced of his guilt and misery, embraces the promise of life and salvation through him. The effect of which will be a solemn renunciation of the base servitude of sin, a cordial desire and aim to resemble and please God, and a deliberate preference of the joys and pleasures of

a Τίς ὑποψίας χρεία, παρὸν σκοπεῖν τί δεῖ πραχθῆναι; Ecquis suspicionis usus est, cum quid fieri oporteat considerare præsto sit?

MARC. ANTON. lib. x.

religion, to all the gratifications and emoluments of the present life.

And for satisfaction upon the latter question, Whether this be *your* character? you must search your heart, and try your ways. *Examine yourselves*, says the apostle, *whether ye be in the faith a. Let every man prove his own work. Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. He who soweth to his flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he who soweth to the spirit, shall of the spirit reap life everlasting b.* Now, as in these enquiries, it behoves you to be strictly impartial, so you ought not to distress yourself with suspicions and jealousies, which are unreasonable and groundless. And such are all those which arise from infirmities and sins, which are common to other good men, as well as you; and which you daily and most heartily confess and lament before God. Do not hastily conclude from them, that you are insincere. Your earnest wish and endeavour, to detect all the latent seeds of hypocrisy in your breast, is a fair proof of your uprightness. Consider well the prevailing desires of your heart, and the general tenor of your conduct. And a due reflection on them, accompanied with your fervent cries to God for the enlivening beams of his favour and love, will be likely, in a good measure, to clear up your doubts upon this interesting question.

If then you have cheerfully and deliberately chosen Christ for your Saviour and King, fear not openly to acknowledge yourself his subject and servant. Conscious that you lay the whole stress of your everlasting interests upon his mediation, and that it is your aim to conform to his will; you may, without incurring the guilt of presumption, take place among his followers. He would not have left it in charge with his disciples, to *receive such* into their number *who are weak in the faith c*; if he had not of his mercy received and acknowledged them himself. Nay, the devoting yourself to his service, amidst many discouraging doubts and fears, will itself afford a noble evidence of the sincerity of your love, and the genuineness of your faith. And now this difficulty removed, you have still another, which not a little distresses you; and that is,

a 2 Cor. xiii. 5. b Gal. vi. 4, 7, 8. c Rom. xiv. 1.

2. The dread of apostacy. "Should I take Christ's yoke upon me, and after a while, like some others, grow weary of it; should I call myself his disciple, and *by and by, when tribulation or persecution ariseth, because of the word, be offended a?* should I openly renounce the world, and afterwards, overcome by its temptations, *and fall into foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in perdition and destruction b:* how deplorable will my condition be!—my Master dishonoured! my profession disgraced! my fellow-disciples grieved! and my own condemnation aggravated beyond that of others! Should this be my unhappy case, *it had been better for* me *not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known* and professed it, thus *to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto me c.*"

But to this it is to be replied. Admitting that there is danger of your apostatizing, this consideration does not alter the state of the question respecting your duty. If you are a real Christian, as you hope and trust you are, you are bound to follow your Master in the practice of his institutions. His command is obligatory on all who believe in him. There are no restrictions in favour of those who are pressed with extraordinary apprehensions or fears of this nature. As therefore the service is to be undertaken, the difficulty and expensiveness, yea, the hazard of it in your view of the matter, ought by no means to deter you from it. Besides, if this excuse is to be admitted in one instance, it is in another. And in that case, since there are no real Christians but have their fears and jealousies of themselves, there would be no professors of religion at all. And what a strange circumstance would this be! that Christ should set up his standard, and that even his friends should none of them come in to it.

Again, it is to be remembered that this diffidence of yourself, provided it is held under proper restraints, is a consideration greatly in your favour; and will prove a means to secure you from the danger you apprehend. Can there be an instance produced, of one who hath in this temper of mind, enlisted under the banner of Christ; and who hath afterwards deserted his colours, and betrayed the cause? Take courage therefore, O timorous disciple of Jesus. Bid defiance to all unreasonable fears.

a Matt. xiii. 21. *b* 2 Tim. vi. 9. *c* 2 Pet. ii. 21.

Many a soldier, whose heart hath trembled at the onset, hath behaved valiantly in the heat of the battle. You have heard also that Christ does not invite persons into his service, and then leave them to their own strength. He hath more tenderness and compassion, I may add, more truth and justice than all this. No. Your Captain goes before you, throws himself into the hottest place, and where the danger is the greatest. Nay, I may add, he hath so laid his measures, and provided in such a manner against every kind of stratagem, surprise or assault, that they who are heartily engaged in his interest may be assured of victory. Can you then call to mind what he hath endured for your sake? Can you reflect how deeply he hath interested himself, in the success of your feeble attempts in his service? Can you believe the many exceeding great and precious promises he hath made you, and which he is as able as he is willing to fulfil? And can you, in a word, realize the glory which shall shortly crown all the conflicts of this your militant state?—and not cheerfully embark in his service—not most readily bow your neck to his yoke.

But there is another kind of objection, I should rather call it excuse, to be removed. And an excuse it is which reflects great dishonour upon those who make it; if indeed charity will allow them to be the real friends of Jesus. It is this,

3. That the positive institutions of Christ are matters of trifling importance, and may be dispensed with, at little or no hazard to a man's present or future interests. Strange! the institutions of Christ of trifling importance!—Blush, Christian, that ever such a word should drop from your lips, or such a thought arise in your breast. To look upon them as necessary to salvation, is indeed to affront the character of Christ as a Saviour, and to undermine the fundamental principles of his gospel. And to substitute them in the room of those weightier matters, *faith, mercy, and judgment*, is to act the part of the corrupt and superstitious Jews, which our Saviour so highly censured. But it does not thence follow, that they are of little or no moment. Both the manner and the ends of their appointment, if duly considered, sufficiently evince their utility and importance.

It was on the very night he was betrayed, our Lord instituted the holy supper, solemnly requiring his disciples *to do this in remembrance of him a*, and leaving it in charge with them, to inculcate the frequent observation of it through every future age *b*. And it was upon the memorable occasion of his ascending up into heaven, he commissioned his apostles to *go teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost*; at the same time giving sufficient intimation, that he meant to extend this commission to all succeeding ministers, by adding his gracious promise, *Lo I am with you alway, even to the end of the world c*. Nor should we forget the declaration which immediately follows his commission in another evangelist, *He who believeth, and is baptized, shall be saved; but he who believeth not, shall be damned d*. By his connecting baptism with faith, in the former clause, he plainly forbids our treating that institution with indifference: and by his omitting it in the latter, we are taught not to lay an undue stress upon it, as necessary to salvation. To which it must be added, that the nature and intent of these sacred rites, as they are explained in the New Testament, clearly prove them to have been designed, not only as public tests of our love and obedience, but as means to promote our comfort and edification.

What then is the spirit of their reasoning and conduct, who can allow themselves in the neglect of Christ's institutions, under the vain pretence of their being of trifling consideration? Forgive me if I say, you do in effect dispute the authority, or however censure the wisdom and goodness of Christ. You deprive yourself of one evidence at least of your sincerity. You stand excluded, by your own consent, from the natural and appointed means of improvement in religion. And instead of aiding and promoting the interest of the Redeemer, you by this strange conduct greatly discourage and weaken it. And now I ask, do not these considerations give you real pain? They will, I am persuaded, if your affection for Christ is sincere and genuine. Call up to your view the infinite obligations, which his unparalleled goodness hath laid upon you. And then say, what characters of disingenuity and baseness your conduct will

a Luke xxii. 19, 20. *b* 1 Cor. xi. 26.
c Matt. xxviii. 19, 20. *d* Mark. xvi. 16.

merit, if shame or sloth, or this unreasonable pretence I have been exposing, should any longer prevail to hold you back from your duty.

THIRDLY, I have now only to address myself, in a few words, to those who have *taken Christ's yoke upon them*, and are enrolled among his followers.

Your honour and privilege, my friends, is very great: far greater than if you were the disciples of the wisest man, or the servants of the most powerful prince on earth. It is by false measures we too commonly make out estimate of what we call real happiness and glory. The wealth and grandeur of the world strike our imagination, and the opinions and customs of mankind govern our inclinations and pursuits. But when the vail of sense is drawn aside, and faith presents to our view the adorable Jesus arrayed in all his infinite perfections, what amazing splendour does the majesty of his character reflect on the meanest of his followers! Myriads of happy spirits surround his throne; and they all account it their chief felicity to contemplate his excellencies, and their highest honour to obey his commands. Who would not wish, then, to make one in the number of his retinue? This is your distinguishing privilege. And whatever circumstances of poverty or affliction may attend your outward condition, if he owns you for his disciples, and you bear any resemblance to him, there is more real dignity in your character and profession, than the proudest monarch can boast of, who is a slave to sin and sense. Angels congratulate you—good men love you—even the wicked themselves, on some occasions, revere you.

Need I after this say, Be not ashamed of the yoke of Christ? —You are not. It is your highest honour; and with the great apostle you cheerfully join issue, 'God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of Christ *a*.' On the other hand, need I caution you to beware, how you disgrace your profession, by an unsuitable temper and conduct? It is your dread: keep in mind, therefore, the obligations which Christ hath laid upon you, and your voluntary engagements to him. His interests and yours are united: by the love therefore you bear to him, and the concern you feel for your own happiness, be persuaded

a Gal. vi. 14.

to stand at a distance from sin. You have *named the name of Christ; depart* therefore *from all iniquity a.* You are the expectants of a better world; *be not* therefore *conformed to this b.* You are *children of the light; have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness c.*

Neither be you weary of the yoke of Christ. There are circumstances, as you have heard, which do sometimes make it painful. Afflictions of various kinds you must expect to meet with; and animal nature is not always in a like capacity to bear them. Many active services also are required of us; and the want of a lively temper of mind, will sometimes render them rather tedious and irksome. But be careful, amidst all, that you indulge not an unkind thought of your Master, or of his service. Cultivate a sincere and cordial love to him, and this will make you superior to every difficulty and discouragement. It is happy to be able to say, after having tried his yoke, *I love my Master, I will not go out free d.* Maintain daily communion with him; and this will put life and vigour into your obedience. If ever there was a time, when Peter was tempted to think hardly of Christ's yoke, it was when *he followed him afar off e.* Neutrality in religion is dangerous. The very first symptoms of it are therefore to be watched and dreaded. Call to mind the many enlivening exhortations of God's word; and consider well the examples it sets before you. And pray earnestly for divine grace to enable you to persevere.

To conclude. Amidst all the fatigues and sorrows of the present life, and which attend the faithful discharge of your duty, be comforted with the joyful prospect of a future happy immortality. *There remaineth a rest for the people of God f.* You shall ere long cease from your labours, and receive your reward. Your Master *endured the cross, and despised the shame;* and he is now *set down on the right hand of the throne of God g.* And he hath promised that *they who suffer with him, shall reign with him h;* and that *where he is, there his servants shall be also i.* O happy day, when you shall arrive at your home! and Christ shall himself welcome you thither, with those kind

a 2 Tim. ii. 19. *b* Rom. xii. 2. *c* Eph. v. 8—11.
d Exod. xxi. 5. *e* Matt. xxvi. 51. *f* Heb. iv. 9.
g Chap. xii. 2. *h* 2 Tim. ii. 12. *i* John xii. 26.

and transporting words, *Well done, good and faithful servant; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord* a.

DISCOURSE VII.

THE PLEASANTNESS OF RELIGION.

PROV. III. 17.—*Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace.*

COULD we convince men that the service of Christ is not that uneasy yoke, that grievous burden, which through the prejudices of corrupt nature it is generally understood to be, it were, methinks, a considerable point gained. This however, hath been attempted; and I would hope, through the blessing of God, not without some success. But must we stop here? Is it the only commendation of the religion of the heart, that it will do no one any real harm? To suppose this, were surely to do it great injustice. O no! There are divine, substantial and durable pleasures attending the experience and practice of it. To prove this will therefore be our present business. And if we are so happy as to be fully and cordially persuaded of this most certain truth, we cannot fail of being captivated with its charms, and so becoming willing converts to its sacred dictates.

That Solomon is here speaking of serious religion is beyond all doubt. Nor is it without good reason that he gives it, in the preceding verses, the denomination of *Wisdom*, agreeably to his own character, and the professed design of this book of Proverbs *b*. For if there be such a thing as wisdom in the world, that surely has the best claim to this description, which gives us the clearest apprehensions of God, his nature and perfections; which leads us into the most intimate acquaintance with ourselves; which instructs us wherein our true interest

a Matt. xxv. 21. *b* Chap. i. 1—4.

lies; and which marks out to our view the path to life and blessedness. Now the wise man pronounces him *happy who finds* this *wisdom and who gets* this *understanding*; assuring us that it is a prize infinitely more valuable than *silver or gold*, than the most *precious rubies*, or any of the delights of sense whatsoever. *Length of days*, says he, *is in her right hand, and in her left hand riches and honour a.* To which he adds in the text, *Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace.*

By the *ways* and *paths* of wisdom is meant the whole of religion, both the contemplative and practical part of it. And each of these is *peaceful* and *pleasant.* So they are declared to be by the unerring word of God, and so they have been found to be by the experience of the wisest and best of men. *Great peace have they*, sings the psalmist with a cheerful note, *who love thy law, and nothing shall offend them b.* And with him the beloved disciple of Jesus readily joins concert, when he tells us, that its *commands are not grievous c*, that is, they are pleasant and joyous.

But before I come to illustrate this cheerful and animating truth, I must just observe that the text is not to be taken so restrictively, as if every good man were a perfectly peaceful and happy man; or as if the ways of religion were all of them so easy and pleasant, as not to admit of any circumstance which is disagreeable and irksome. The reverse of this is too plain a fact to be disputed, and hath been acknowledged and accounted for in a former discourse. Perfect happiness is not to be enjoyed here: nor is it possible it should, considering the present imperfect and depraved state of things. The best of men must needs feel some painful sensations within, from that continual struggle between grace and corruption, which ever prevails in their breasts. And as from a strict observation of themselves, they find daily occasion for humiliation before God; they cannot but on that account, endure a degree of anxiety and distress, though not all that gloominess and despondency which is the sad fruit of unpardoned guilt. And then the outward disappointments and trials to which they are liable in common with others, must be a source of at least some inward affliction; since

a Ver. 13—16. *b* Psal. cxix. 165. *c* 1 John v. 3.

religion does not divest them of their passions, or make them insensible to external things. To which it may be added, that God himself is sometimes pleased for wise ends to withhold the enlivening influence of his grace: and when thus a dark cloud spreads itself over all their pleasant experiences, it is not to be wondered at that they are in trouble. But in neither of these instances is religion itself, strictly speaking, the *cause* of sorrow; though by reason of the corruption of human nature, and the unavoidable connections of the present life, it is the *occasion* of it. And as to those Christians, if such there be, who always wear a mournful countenance; the greater part of their uneasiness is to be imputed either to natural constitution, or else to mistaken notions about religion itself.

Now these things considered, the difficulty with respect to the observation in the text is in a good measure removed. And after all, though it were admitted, that some of the ways of wisdom are rough and unpleasant, yet this would by no means disprove the general truth of Solomon's maxim; since most proverbial sayings will admit of some particular exceptions, and the plain meaning of that before us is, that it is the natural tendency of religion to make men peaceful and happy.

We will now therefore proceed immediately to the illustration of this argument, which we shall do by shewing, that the knowledge and experience of religion hath a mighty effect,

I. To remove the principal causes of disquietude: and,

II. To minister the highest occasions of joy and pleasure.

We are here speaking of the mind, which is on all hands acknowledged to be the chief seat of happiness and pleasure. If that be easy and cheerful, it is not of essential consequence what our outward circumstances may be. How then,

I. Is religion adapted to remove the principal causes of inward uneasiness? Now these are reducible to three heads;—*doubt and uncertainty*—*guilt and fear*—and that *disorder and restlessness of spirit*, which arises from the prevalence of turbulent and ungovernable passions.

1. *Doubt and uncertainty.* This every one knows, who hath been at all conversant with himself, is an occasion of much anxiety and trouble. Whatever be the affair we are thoughtful about, while the mind remains in suspense, it must needs be

unhappy. And its unhappiness will always be proportioned to the importance of the object. Now the great principles of religion, which have for their object, the well-being of mankind both here and hereafter, are surely of all other matters the most important. And of consequence whilst the mind is doubtful of their truth, it cannot but be exceedingly perplexed and uneasy. Some, indeed, are so stupid, as to trouble themselves little, if at all, about these things. Whatever peace therefore, they may fondly boast of, it is the fruit of ignorance and insensibility. Yet there is, I suppose, hardly a man to be found, but is at one time or other, pressed with some such questions as these—Is there a God that judgeth in the earth?—Am I accountable to him?—Will my soul exist in another state after death?—By what measure will future happiness and misery be dispensed to mankind? These questions, and others of the like nature, will frequently arise in the thoughtful breast, and at certain seasons force themselves on every mind.

But whilst they remain questions, that is, whilst the judgment is at any loss to determine upon their truth, or is dissuaded through the violence of depraved passions, from pronouncing decisively concerning them, a man cannot fail of being unhappy. Whilst conscience speaks one thing, and the inclinations another; whilst reason and scripture affirm, and sense and sin deny; whilst the man knows not how to withhold his assent, and yet, unwilling to yield, presses every little objection into the service of unbelief; whilst I say this is the case, how great must be the perturbation of his mind! He neither believes, nor yet disbelieves. He is bewildered with doubts, perplexed with uncertainties, tossed from one extreme to another; and in short, like the dove which Noah sent out of the ark, finds no ground on which to rest the sole of his foot.

Now the knowledge and experience of religion sets a man in a good measure free from these anxieties, allays this ferment in his breast, settles his hope on a sure foundation, puts an end to these continual struggles, and restores an agreeable composure to the mind. They who are fond of improvements in natural knowledge, are sensible enough how pleasant the transition is, from doubt and uncertainty on any point, to full and clear evidence. But the pleasure here is so much the greater, as the

objects of divine knowledge are more excellent and important. Let the Christian say, who, by the grace of God, hath happily emerged out of all the darkness of scepticism, into the light and faith of the gospel; what anxieties he hath been relieved of, and what tranquillity and pleasure he hath of consequence enjoyed. Of the great principles of religion, he is satisfied upon the best evidence; evidence of which he hath been enabled to form the clearer judgment, by having the embarrassments and restraints of corrupt inclinations corrected and subdued; and evidence which hath received farther confirmation, from the influence he hath found these principles to have upon his heart and life.

And how pleasant must be the assent which the mind gives to the truth, when it hath thus the ready concurrence of the will, and the firm supports of personal experience! The storm in which the man had like to have been shipwrecked now subsides. The darkness which before surrounded him on all sides, now clears up. And whatever contrary winds may sometimes blow upon him, yet having cast anchor on the promise and oath of him who cannot lie, he in some good degree rides safe and easy. This surely is a most desirable state, and shews the infinite excellence of real religion, which thus collects the scattered, wandering and uncertain notions of the mind, as it were in one point, and so frees it from the endless perplexities of doubt and scepticism.

2. *Guilt* is another, and indeed the principal cause of inward uneasiness. Nor is there any anguish so sharp and pungent, as that occasioned by remorse of conscience, and the fear of God's displeasure. *The spirit of a man may sustain his infirmities, but a wounded spirit who can bear a? Who knoweth the power of God's anger: according to his fear so is his wrath b.* It is true the terror which guilt excites, does not in every person arise to the like height; but is proportioned to the sense impressed upon the heart, of the evil of sin and its just demerit. Yet the very consciousness that we have done amiss, the bare imagination that God is displeased, and the apprehension alone, of some inconvenience which our guilt may bring upon us, must needs make the mind uneasy. How can a man

a Prov. xviii. 14. *b* Psal. xc. 11.

be happy, while there is something within which tells him, that he is not what he should be, and that he does the thing he ought not to do? While he suspects that a holy, just and powerful God is his enemy, and feels some forebodings in himself of future judgment and misery?

Men do indeed by various ways attempt to relieve themselves of these uneasy thoughts; some by flying to their pleasures, and putting the evil day at a distance; and others by seeking a retreat in infidelity, or resting their hopes on a flattering notion of uncovenanted mercy. But still these fears will frequently return upon them. And it is a fact, that use what attempts they will, they cannot easily persuade themselves to believe, that they have not deserved something which is bad at the hand of God, and that a day of reckoning will not, sooner or later, come. Now such apprehensions, call them by what name you please, say they, are the effects of madness, enthusiasm or superstition; yet they must needs be very troublesome to a man, and greatly disturb his peace and comfort. They must, whenever they arise in his mind, embitter his sensual pleasures, and aggravate his worldly sorrows. *There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked: they are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt a.*

How great then, must be the blessedness of true religion, which furnishes a remedy for all these complaints! Faith, that grand principle of divine life, presents to the sinner's view, the amiable character of Divine mercy, supported by truth and justice; shews him the altar of burnt offering, with the bleeding sacrifice of the Son of God thereon; then pronounces in his ears, with a small and still voice, the free pardon of all his sins through the blood of the Lamb. And thus, breaking up the springs of penitential sorrow in his heart, it relieves him of the sad and gloomy fears which before oppressed his spirits. It is guilt that haunts the mind with melancholy. That therefore must be a pleasant thing, though infidelity would call it no better than a charm, which drives the wretched spectre from the breast, and restores peace and cheerfulness to the soul. And O what—what can do this, but faith in the Lord Jesus Christ? Worldly pleasures, or the false reasonings of self-deception, may

a Isa. lvii. 20, 21.

afford some temporary relief; but it is only temporary. The enemy quickly returns to the charge, and with greater fury than before. But this is a shield, proof against the most violent assaults of Satan. This is balm which cannot fail of healing the wounded conscience. Other remedies may fondly promise success; yet being tried, they are found to be ineffectual. But this assures us of relief upon the most satisfactory considerations; and as it comes recommended by divine authority, so it hath the support of innumerable examples. And how desirable the blessing, to have a calm restored to the tumultuous breast, its terrifying fears of the wrath of God removed, and peace established in the conscience upon a sure and honourable foundation! Well, such is the felicity of true religion.

To which it must be added, that it is the effectual means of preserving the Christian from a great deal of that folly, sin and profaneness, into which the unbridled passions of the wicked hurry them; and consequently of securing him from a great deal of that self-condemnation, remorse and torment which they feel. As it directs us to the proper cure for our guilty fears; so being cured, it teaches us how the health and tranquillity of the soul is to be preserved. Once more,

3. Another cause of uneasiness to the mind, is *the restlessness and turbulency of unsanctified passions.* Infinite is the mischief we suffer through these means. It is to the folly and perverseness of our own hearts, rather than the events and occurrences of life, that the chief part of our troubles is to be imputed. How do pride, envy, covetousness, impatience, and the like evil affections, while they hold a man in subjection to their cruel dominion, continually distress and torment him! They cannot always be gratified: that is in its own nature impossible. And being thwarted and opposed, what a wretched tumult do they occasion! Would we frame an idea of misery, we need only figure to ourselves the man of ambition, denied the respect and honour he haughtily claims; or the avaricious man disappointed of his expectations, and reduced to poverty; or the impatient and self-willed man crossed in his views and purposes. He, therefore, who throws the reins on the neck of his passions, and suffers them to have the controul, is his own enemy; an enemy as well to his peace and comfort, as his honour and usefulness.

Occasions of uneasiness he must of necessity meet with every day of his life, and the indulgence of his corruptions must render that uneasiness unavoidable.

Now the grace of God removes, at least in a degree, this sad cause of pain and trouble. It strikes at the root of our corruptions, and forbids them to rule and tyrannize in the heart. It renews and sanctifies the passions. It makes a man humble, contented, patient and ready to forgive; and so, agreeably to the prevalence of these virtues, it frees him from the restlessness and misery of contrary affections. The wicked are their own tormentors. But he who fears God, whatever pain he may endure in mortifying his irregular appetites, yet hereby escapes innumerable anxieties and vexations, in which the indulgence of them would necessarily involve him. To this effect our Saviour speaks, when, having proposed himself as an example of meekness and humility, he assures us, that by *learning of him, we shall find rest to our souls* a.

PART II.

We have seen how religion tends to remove the principal causes of inward disquietude. Let us now proceed,

II. To consider the positive joys and pleasures which accompany it. And here I shall confine myself to these three particulars—the rich entertainment it affords the understanding—the animating hopes and comforts of which it possesses the heart—and the solid satisfaction and pleasure which attend the practice of it.

First, The discoveries of religion afford the highest entertainment to the understanding.

This they must needs do to a renewed mind, since, for their richness, variety and importance, they infinitely exceed any other whatsoever. It is the office of divine wisdom to draw aside the vail of sense, and to present to our dark and benighted minds the most amiable of all objects, the ever-blessed God, the fountain of felicity and glory; to reveal to us the counsels of his grace, and the operations of his hands; all conducted with infinite wisdom, goodness and truth, and all exactly corresponding with each other; to shew us his only begotten Son,

a Matt. xi. 29.

the grand medium of communion between God and man, descending from the realms of glory, tabernacling in this lower world, leading a life of exalted piety and obedience, enduring a painful and ignominious death, bursting the bands of the grave, and, in our nature, ascending triumphantly up into heaven. It is the friendly office of this wisdom from above, to point out to our view the admirable scheme of redemption, by the obedience, death and resurrection of Christ; the provisions hereby made for the honours of the divine law and government, and for the hope and confidence of every returning penitent; and the inestimable blessings hereby procured, of pardon, justification, adoption and eternal life: to describe the Saviour in his personal and relative excellencies, arrayed in all the splendour of proper divinity, tempered with all the mildness and condescension of sinless humanity, sustaining every character and office suited to the various exigencies of our present state, and intrusted with the infinitely rich and incomparable gifts both of grace and glory. It is the office of this divine instructor, to assure us of the descent, and inhabitation of the Holy Spirit, with all his benign and heavenly influences; proceeding from the Father, and obtained for us through the mediation of the Son; to give us a view of ourselves, our capacities, interests, connections, duties and hopes; and, in a word, to lead us into some distant acquaintance with the world to come, the blessed spirits we are there to associate with, the business we are to be employed about, and the refined and everlasting pleasures we are to enjoy.

Now these, together with many other sublime and heavenly truths, are the subjects to which religion invites our attention. And what subjects so well adapted to entertain the mind, and improve the understanding, even though we considered them as speculations only! But when we enter into the evidence by which they are supported, and reflect on their matchless excellence, and their prodigious utility, how can the soul of man fail, if in a healthful state, of feeling a seraphic pleasure in the contemplation of them—A pleasure far surpassing that which the most studious mind enjoys, as the perquisite of all that pain and labour which attend the investigation of natural truth? This is knowledge so noble, so interesting, so important, that

it will hardly admit of a comparison with any other whatsoever. *I count all things but loss and dung*, says he who was bred at the feet of Gamaliel, *for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus, my Lord a.* Nay the wisest man that ever lived, hardly knew how to be profuse enough in his commendation of it, as the only source of the truest pleasure and advantage. *Happy is he who findeth wisdom, and who getteth understanding. The merchandise of it is better than the merchandise of silver, and the gain thereof than fine gold b.*

The joy which some have felt in their pursuit of divine knowledge, has been so great, that they have forgot their necessary food, have been for a while wrapt up into heaven, and have become insensible to almost every thing here below. It was a contemplation on these subjects that so ravished the heart of David, when in an ecstacy he cried out, *How excellent is thy loving kindness, O God c! How precious are thy thoughts unto me! How great is the sum of them d!* And it was in this manner, we may reasonably suppose, the great apostle was employed, when he was caught up into paradise, and knew not whether he was in the body, or out of the body. Here then there is all the richness, variety, strangeness, and if the expression may be allowed, all the novelty which can be desired, to make this knowledge most agreeable and entertaining. Of the contemplative part of religion, it may therefore truly be said, that *its ways are pleasantness, and its paths peace.* But we will now go on,

SECONDLY, To the hopes and comforts of which it possesses the heart.

And here I have nothing to say of any worldly prospects of wealth, honour or pleasure. I have no gay scene of glittering delights to present to the youthful imagination; nor any high cordial of sensual bliss to minister to the carnal heart. None of the great things of this life hath Christ insured to his disciples, but hath rather taught them to expect tribulation in their way through it. Yet he hath not left them comfortless; but hath provided them pleasures, which, as they are spiritual, so are substantial and satisfying; pleasures adapted to cheer their breasts amidst the most painful afflictions, and to add a new

a Phil. iii. 8. b Prov. iii. 13, 14.
c Psal. xxxvi. 7. d Psal. cxxxix. 17.

relish to their most agreeable outward enjoyments. And what are they? why, such as arise from a peaceful conscience,—a sense of the favour of God—faith in divine providence,—communion with heaven—and the hope of eternal life.

1. How desirable a blessing is *peace of conscience!* The terrors of an awakened breast and of a self-accusing heart, are most dreadful indeed, as we have already seen. They spread a gloom wherever they are felt, over all the chearful scenes of life, unfit a man for his duties and enjoyments, impair his health, eat into his very vitals, and if not removed, or at least abated, bring death and destruction after them. How happy then to have all easy, quiet and serene within! So sensible are even bad men themselves of the importance of this, that if they cannot obtain peace with conscience, that mighty enemy, on safe and honourable terms, they will bribe him into a reconciliation, or else will try their utmost to lay violent hands upon his life.

But is it not infinitely better, to have conscience in a sound, healthful, friendly state? Such then is the happiness of the man of religion, the man who, believing in Christ, walks humbly with God in the course of his duty. Amidst his daily weaknesses and infirmities, which are also the occasions of daily sorrow and humiliation, it is his care to avoid sin. And though he dare not flatter himself with any idea of perfection, or avail himself of any supposed merit of his own before God, yet, humbly hoping his heart is right with God, he chearfully sets about the business of his station, quietly submits to the disappointments he meets with, and pleasantly enjoys the fruit of his labour. *This is* his *rejoicing, the testimony of* his *conscience, that in simplicity, and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God,* he hath his *conversation in the world a.*

2. What substantial felicity must there be in *a sense of God's favour!* To have God for our enemy, is to be exposed to the greatest mischiefs and dangers imaginable; and even to apprehend this to be the case, is very distressing. But it is the business of religion to free a man from these anxious and fearful apprehensions, and to possess him of the contrary views and sentiments. Faith in the gospel of Christ clears up his doubts upon those points, which are most apt to strengthen and exas-

a 2 Cor. i. 12.

perate the fears of natural conscience, such as the justice and veracity of God, the threatenings of his law, and the miseries of the present life. And while it convinces him that God can be just, when he justifies him who believes in Jesus, it inspires a humble hope in his breast, that he will be merciful to *his* unrighteousness, and will remember *his* iniquities no more. So the heavy burden which had oppressed his heart is removed; the dark cloud which had been gathering around his mind is dispelled; and the sun of righteousness arises upon his broken and disconsolate spirits, with healing under his wings. God becomes his friend, and *in his favour is life*. All his perfections are propitious to him, and he rejoices in their influence. Trusting in him as his refuge, he is secure from every danger; and hoping in him as his portion, he is blessed with every good.

If the favour of an earthly prince makes a man's countenance shine, puts joy into his heart, and adds strength to his hands, what a happy effect must a sense of *his* favour produce, who reigns over the universe, and hath all things at his disposal! It was this blessing the psalmist wished to enjoy, when, amidst the sovereign contempt he felt for every thing in comparison with God, he thus poured out his soul to Heaven, *Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon me a.* And it was the infinite pleasantness of this great blessing he meant to describe, when in the next verse he adds, *Thou hast put gladness in my heart, more than in the time that their corn and their wine increased b.* And who can forbear envying the prophet Asaph of the happiness he so sensibly experienced, when he addressed his God in those passionate words, *Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee c.* And hence we are naturally led to reflect,

3. On the comfort that arises out of *a firm faith of divine providence*, which is another branch of religion. That the great God concerns himself as well about the affairs of individuals, as of the world in general, is a clear doctrine of revelation, nor is there any one principle in nature to contradict it. And how admirably is this truth adapted, on the one hand, to soothe the breast of the good man amidst the perplexities and disappointments of life; and on the other, to infuse an additional sweet-

a Psal. iv. 6. b Ver. 7. c Psal. lxxiii. 25.

ness and pleasure into all the unexpected successes of it! It is impossible, if his religion has that influence on his mind, which it may and ought to have, but that he should stand firm in a time of trial, and enjoy a degree of composure at least, when sadness and misery sit upon the face of every surrounding object. Animated with this truly noble and rational principle, he will behave with a heroism far superior to that which is the fruit of stoical insensibility. So that amidst all the feelings of humanity, of which he is susceptible in common with others, we shall find him thus silently reasoning with himself—"God is infinitely wise and good. The reins of government are in his hands; and he manages all things well. I am afflicted; but it is God who afflicts me, and in afflicting me, he consults my good as well as his own glory. Be calm, then, all ye angry passions of my mind. Father, thy will be done. To thee I refer my concerns. On thee I cast my burden, for thou carest for me." Now this temper, as it is most fit and reasonable in itself, so it tends to lighten the burden of our afflictions, or to strengthen us to endure it. And what is this temper but religion? To what does it owe its existence, but to the grace of God?

And on the other hand, you easily see how the flavour of every earthly enjoyment, must needs be heightened and refined, by a due regard had to the influence of divine providence therein. "This, says the good man, is a cordial sent me from heaven. The hand that prepares and administers it, puts joy into it, and, at the same time, provides against any undue effect of it. It is the fruit of his goodness and love. As such I relish it, as such I acknowledge it, as such I would use it to his glory. The consideration of his kindness, whilst it increases my pleasure, prevents my ungratefully dishonouring him, or foolishly injuring myself, by transferring my affections from the Giver, to the bounty itself he thus generously bestows." So you see how pleasant a life he must live, in whose breast the cordial belief of a providence triumphs over all the madness and folly of atheism and infidelity. But again,

4. The pleasures of a religious life are still farther heightened and improved, by that *communion with God*, to which the Christian is on some occasions admitted. Happiness consists much

in society. And the pleasures of society consist in a communion of sentiment and affection. And these pleasures are more or less refined and exalted, according to the excellence and perfection of those with whom we associate. Now, as the pleasures which men of refined wit and learning enjoy in each other's society, far exceed those of brutal sensualists or sordid worldlings; so, upon the very same principle, the pleasures which Christians enjoy in communion with God, may be supposed to exceed those of the wisest sages, or the most ingenious philosophers. With no one can we converse, so great and glorious, so amiable and excellent as God. It is true, he is a Spirit, invisible and incomprehensible; whence communion with him may to some persons seem a very mysterious thing. Yet if among men, it be no other than a mutual exchange of ideas and affections, why should it be thought strange, that an intercourse, somewhat similar to this, should subsist between God and his people? Why should it be thought strange, that whilst they are employed in contemplating his perfections and will, in his word and works, and in pouring out their souls at his feet, in love, confidence, and praise, he should condescend to irradiate their minds with bright conceptions of himself, and to gladden their hearts with a lively sense of his favour?

And think you it can be otherwise, than that a good man should feel inward delight and joy, in thus surveying the image of the blessed God, drawn out on the works of his hands, in thus drinking in the pure satisfaction of being interested in his love, and in thus giving back his heart to God in cheerful resentments of gratitude and praise? God is the fountain of all good. Yet the generality stop short of the fountain, and content themselves, regardless of God, with the distant streams of his bounty, and which they have first polluted with their own lawless passions. But the Christian, by conversing with heaven, is led up to the source of all good, and there, sometimes with expanding desires and improving capacities, takes in his fill of pure joys and refreshing delights. O happy souls, who are thus for a while absorbed in God, wrapt up to heaven in holy meditations, and made to taste at least of *the river of pleasure, which proceeds out of the throne of God and the Lamb!* With Peter upon the mount of transfiguration, they say, *It is*

good to be here a! and with the two disciples, after their having been entertained with our Saviour's company to Emmaus, *Did not our hearts burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures b?* But there is,

5. One more source of pleasure, which religion supplies, and that is, *the hope of eternal life.* It hath often been remarked of the pleasures of this world, that they are, for the most part, greater in expectation than enjoyment. So that the chief happiness of even a man of the world may be said to consist in hope. And what makes this passion, when thus fixed on sublunary enjoyments, so cheerful and enlivening, is, that the objects it proposes are most agreeable to animal nature; that our imagination heightens their excellence; that we flatter ourselves we shall assuredly enjoy them; and that the possession of them seems nigh at hand. But, methinks, it must considerably lessen this sort of pleasure, when we reflect, that experience is every day giving fresh proof of the deceitfulness of all worldly expectations, both in regard of the value of the things themselves, and the uncertainty of obtaining them. At a distance they appear excessively alluring, but they sicken in the enjoyment: and when we imagine ourselves on the point of possessing them, they often elude our embraces.

Now, on the other hand, though the objects of religious hope are spiritual, invisible and distant, yet faith puts a reality, importance and excellence into them, which it is easy to see, must heighten the pleasure arising from the certain expectation of them, greatly beyond any worldly prospect. We are sure the things to be enjoyed, cannot be estimated above their real value, yea that it has not entered into the heart of man to conceive how great and good they are. The evidence of their existence will not admit of a reasonable doubt. The hope of enjoying them, if built on Christ alone, and productive of purity in our lives, cannot deceive. And then as to the period of our possessing them, we know not but it is nigh at hand: the distance, however, imagine it what you will, is, on various accounts, very trifling and inconsiderable. Does it not follow then, that the hope of eternal life, thus prevailing in the breast, under the conduct of a lively faith, must be fruitful of the most

a Luke ix. 33. *b* Chap. xxiv. 32.

refined and substantial pleasure to a renewed mind? "It is such a blessed hope, that every soul ought to be charmed and transported with it," said a Heathen, even while he acknowledged it to be a matter of probability only—a kind of *venture* a. Think then what the Christian may be supposed to enjoy, when faith supported by the noblest evidence, transports him beyond the line of time, lands him on the shore of everlasting happiness, and introduces him into the society of the blessed: what he must feel, while he beholds him who is invisible, conversed with the infinitely adorable Jesus in his exalted state, and realizes the honours, employments and pleasures of the spirits of just men made perfect: what joy, in a word, must circulate about his heart, while he is told, that all this felicity and glory is his, and that ere long he shall be put into the full and everlasting possession of it.

Such then are the comforts with which religion inspires the heart—peace of conscience—a sense of God's favour—faith in divine providence—communion with heaven—and the joyful hope of a happy immortality.

PART III.

From the view we have taken of the entertainment which the great truths of religion afford to the understanding, and of the joy with which the hopes and promises of it cheer and refresh the heart, we proceed to consider,

Thirdly, The solid satisfaction and pleasure there is in the practice of it. And here we shall have our eye both on the general temper and conduct which religion enjoins, and on the particular duties of devotion and worship it requires.

1. As to *the general temper and conduct* which religion teaches and recommends. It hath been already acknowledged, that some of the graces requisite to form the character of a good man, are, by reason of the corruption of human nature, and our particular connections and situations in life, attended with their peculiar discouragements. Repentance, humility, patience and self-denial, cannot be mentioned, without conveying the idea of uneasiness and pain. *The sacrifices of God are*

a—Καλὸς γὰρ ὁ κίνδυνος, καὶ χρὴ τὰ τοιαῦτα ὥσπερ ἐπᾴδειν ἑαυτῷ. Plat. Phæd. p. 180. edit. Cantab.

a broken spirit, and a contrite heart a. The disciples of Christ must be *poor in spirit b.* We are *to crucify the flesh with the affections and lusts c; to endure afflictions d:* and instead of *avenging ourselves* of those that injure us, we are *rather to give place unto wrath, and to overcome evil with good e.* And it is in respect of all this, as well as the affliction itself of an outward kind to which the profession of religion will sometimes expose us, that *the gate* is said to be *strait,* and *the way narrow, that leads to life f.*

But however sharp the discipline of the heart may seem, and most certainly is, yet we may safely affirm, that it is not only the way to pleasure, but it hath a degree of pleasure intermixed with it. And though it is hard to gain the mastery over our lusts, yet the victory being in some measure obtained, we rejoice. He whose appetites are subdued and brought under the restraints of reason, feels greater satisfaction in a seasonable abstinence from sensual gratifications, than others do in excess. The philosopher, therefore, well replied, when he was blamed by his friend for not indulging himself at an entertainment, "That he abstained for the same reason that the other exceeded, that was, for his pleasure." So, farther, though the pangs of an awakened conscience are bitter and painful, yet the relentings of ingenuous sorrow are soft and pleasing. And though persecution is far from being agreeable to flesh and blood, yet there is a sweetness and pleasure in those sensations of divine love, which determine us to suffer for our Master, rather than deny him. Nay our Saviour, by bidding his persecuted followers *rejoice and be exceeding glad g,* supposes it more than a possible thing, for the mind of a good man to be cheerful amidst the greatest outward troubles. A truth this sufficiently verified by history and experience. So that even the most irksome part of religion, if any of it may be so styled, is not without its pleasures.

And then as to those *other* graces which enter into the character of a Christian, they manifestly bring their own reward with them. Faith, hope, and love, having the greatest good for

a Psal. li. 17. *b* Matt. v. 3. *c* Gal. v. 24.
d 2 Tim. iv. 5. *e* Rom. xii. 19—21. *f* Matt. vii. 14.
g Matt. v. 12.

their object, do directly tend, not to vex, distress and torment, but to soothe, delight and ravish the heart. We have already seen how pleasant a thing it is to converse with God, confide in him, and love him. But to descend from these, the noblest exercises of religion, to the practice of its sacred dictates towards our fellow-creatures. Say, you who have walked in the ways of truth, justice and holiness, and in the paths of friendship, sympathy and love, whether these are not *ways of pleasantness, and paths of peace!* To a mind formed after the image of the infinitely pure and righteous God, a base and dishonourable action must be an unnatural and painful thing. How great then the satisfaction of doing unto others, as we would have them do unto us! And how still more exalted the pleasure of doing them such acts of kindness, as they have no equitable claim to, and of which indeed there are few examples in this inhospitable world! Say, O say, Christian, is it not a pleasant thing *to go about doing good?* Have not you often felt the truth of what was frequently on your Master's lips, That *it is more blessed to give than to receive a?* Is there not a peculiar sweetness and agreeableness in that compassion, which makes you a sharer with all around you in their distresses? And does not that love, which knits your hearts to your fellow-Christians in the sacred bonds of divine friendship, make you truly happy? Wherein consists the chief felicity of heaven but in the tender endearments of pure love, and the substantial joys of mutual benevolence? What then is this part of the practice of religion, but the beginning, the budding, the early dawn of that bliss? In short, what grace is there which the Bible recommends, whether it respect God, ourselves, or one another, which has not as well the most powerful charms to captivate a renewed heart, as it hath the most forcible arguments to convince an upright mind? And if there be this solid satisfaction and pleasure attending the general temper and conduct, which religion enjoins, the like may be truly affirmed,

2. Of *the particular duties of devotion and worship.* There is little indeed in the forms of religion themselves that is either pleasant or profitable. Wherefore it is not to be wondered at, that they who neither understand their meaning, nor enter into

a Acts xx. 35.

the spirit of what is expressed by them, should soon grow weary of them. Nor is it to be doubted, that most men would entirely lay aside positive duties, if it were not for the force of education and example; and if the tediousness of them were not in some sort compensated, by the external pomp and ceremony which human authority has annexed to them. But however disagreeable the forms of religion may be, in all their native simplicity, to a carnal mind, yet the spirit of vital godliness infuses a real pleasure into them, so that these services which would otherwise be dull and irksome, become cheerful and entertaining.

Will you say, Christian, it is a hard service to profess your faith in Christ, and your subjection to his authority, by being baptized into his name, and attending on the memorials of his death? No; it is rather in your apprehension pleasant, thus to express your cordial affection to his person and interests, and your infinite obligations to his compassion and love, especially when he deigns to crown these institutions with his gracious and enlivening presence. Will you say that prayer is a tedious, lifeless, unavailing exercise? No; you will give a very different account of it, when you have been pouring out your heart in public, in the family, or in the closet, with that faith, contrition and fervency which the nature of this duty requires. I will add, to read the Scriptures, to hear them explained, and to unite with others in praising God for his manifold goodness, are services as entertaining and pleasing to a good man, when in a proper frame of mind, as they are instructive and useful. These things speak for themselves. A heart duly impressed with the truth, excellence and importance of the great concerns of religion, cannot but taste, on some occasions at least, a peculiar sweetness in these divine and spiritual exercises. *O how I love thy law!* says David, *it is my meditation all the day a.* It is *sweeter to me than honey, and the honey-comb b. Thy statutes have been my songs in the house of my pilgrimage c. How amiable are thy tabernacles, O Lord of Hosts! My soul longeth, yea even fainteth for the courts of the Lord; my heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God. Blessed are they that dwell in thy house; they will be still praising thee. A day in thy courts is*

a Psal. cxix. 97. *b* Psal. xix. 10. *c* Psal. cxix. 54.

better than a thousand. I had rather be a door-keeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness a.

Thus have I endeavoured to prove to you the pleasantness of religion, from a contemplation of the reason and nature of the thing, and from the concurrent testimony of wise and good men. It tends to remove the principal causes of inward uneasiness and trouble, such as doubt and uncertainty, guilt and fear, and the restlessness and turbulency of unsanctified passions. And it ministers the highest occasions of joy and pleasure; it affords the richest entertainment to the understanding; it possesses the heart of the most animating hopes and comforts; and there is solid satisfaction in the exercise of its several graces, and the practice of its several duties.

Let us now make some improvement of the subject.

1. How very unfair is their account of the ways of wisdom, who represent them as rough, tiresome and unpleasant! But who are they who bring us this report of them? They are either such as have never walked in the ways of religion, or those who, if they have taken a few steps therein, have quickly turned back. Wherefore they are incompetent judges, and so not to be regarded. Besides, they are prejudiced in favour of the world, and their own depraved inclinations, and so their testimony is partial, and on that account not to be credited. They are indeed the majority; but since they speak a language contrary to reason itself, and to the sense and experience of the wisest and best men, this consideration ought to give no weight to what they say. If it was criminal in the Israelites to pay greater regard to the report of the ten spies, who were sent to search out the good land, than to that of their two fellows, Caleb and Joshua; it is still more criminal in us, to give heed to the calumnies of those who know less of religion, than those others could be supposed to know of the fair and pleasant country of Canaan. Do not therefore believe them, when they tell you, that the sure way to be unhappy, is to be religious.

And as to those truly good men, who by their gloomy countenances and reserved behaviour, give others an unfavourable opinion of the ways of God; it is to be remembered that those appearances are owing, either to some fault in their natural

a Psal. lxxxiv. 1, 2, 4—10.

temper, or to their having been more conversant with the difficulties than the pleasures of religion. If indeed their deficiency in point of mirth and jollity, is the consideration whence you infer that they are unhappy, you reason very falsely. These are insufficient and mistaken proofs of real cheerfulness and pleasure. *The laughter of the fool*, said the wise man, *is as the crackling of thorns under a pot a.* There may be, and there generally is, more solid satisfaction and comfort in that man's heart, who is of a grave countenance and sober deportment, than in his, who hath little else to recommend him, except the gaiety of his external appearance. But, admitting that there are some Christians of a peculiarly reserved and forbidding carriage, this is to be imputed, as I said, to their natural make: and it is not to be questioned, that if they had known nothing of religion, these ill qualities would, notwithstanding have been sufficiently expressed in their behaviour. And, even though it be a truth, that the unpleasant air we see on their countenances, is sometimes owing to the sorrowful feelings of their hearts; yet, if you ask them, they will freely tell you, that all these their sad complaints arise from the remains of unbelief and sin, and not from any real defect in religion itself. *That* they firmly believe is the most cheerful enlivening thing in the whole world; and they have found it so, on some occasions at least, in their own happy experience. It is therefore an unfair account of the ways of wisdom, that they are all rough, tiresome and unpleasant. The contrary hath I hope been fully proved. Let me however, before I dismiss this particular, caution the real friends of Jesus to guard against such an appearance and deportment, as may at all contribute to strengthen the prejudices of ignorant and worldly men.

2. If the ways of religion are peaceful and pleasant, what pity is it that they are so little frequented! Multitudes we see flocking down the broad road to destruction, while this which leads to eternal life is considered as a bye and gloomy path. Mournful reflection indeed! A reflection which sometimes saddens the heart of the compassionate Christian amidst all his joys. O that men were wise, that they understood this, that they would consider their own true interests! Be persuaded, O vain and

a Eccl. vii. 6.

foolish man, to spend a few moments in comparing the way you are in, with that I have been describing. And then let your reason and conscience decide the question, which of the two is most eligible.

The way you at present choose, may have its pleasures. It is broad, straight and smooth. You endure perhaps little weariness in travelling this road. It is easy to the flesh, and admits of gratifications to which your corrupt nature is strongly prone. You meet with few to molest and trouble you? but, on the contrary, many who earnestly solicit you to go forwards. The company you like. And the scenes which open upon you as you pass, are very enchanting; especially while the bright beams of prosperity gladden your way. But, admitting that it were as pleasant a road as imagination can represent it, and that you were scarce ever to feel any thing within to disturb or make you uneasy; yet, if, after a few months or years, it should hurry you into a land of misery, darkness and despair, how foolish as well as wretched will your choice have been! That this hath been the sad lot of many who have gone before you, is not reasonably to be questioned. There is a faithful witness, I mean him that cannot lie, who tells you as you pass on the way, that *the end* will be *shame* and *ruin a.* And not a few, while they have stood trembling at the gates of death, have loudly warned the multitudes who were crowding after them, of the miseries approaching. If therefore you were to credit their testimony, or only to advert to it as a probable matter; methinks you must needs be unhappy. But however this may be, tell me if your own experience hath not pronounced the gratifications of sense unsatisfying; if you have not often felt disappointment and vexation amidst your most eager pursuits; and if the bitter reflections of your conscience on some occasions, have not more than balanced all your transient joys and pleasures?

And now turn your eyes to the paths of Wisdom, or let the men who have trodden them describe them to you. They seem at first view perhaps, narrow, dark and thorny, and in some respects they may be so. Few frequent them, and of those few, some are not so cheerful as might be expected. Yet upon the whole, this is a safe, peaceful and pleasant road. It is the way

a Rom. vi. 21.

of truth and holiness; and *the wayfaring man, though a fool,* is assured he *shall not err therein a.* The company that use it are all of them the excellent of the earth. Their temper is meek and gentle, and their deportment inoffensive and good. *Their bread is given them,* to use the language of the prophet, *and their waters are sure b. In the wilderness waters break out, and streams in the desert: the parched ground becomes a pool, and the thirsty land springs of water c.* They have peaceful consciences, contented minds, thankful hearts, and sometimes joys which the world cannot give nor take away. Christ is their guide, and his providence their defence. The word of God is their rule, and *his statutes are their songs in the house of their pilgrimage d.* In these paths the wisest and best of men have trodden. And *the end,* the certain end, *is everlasting life e.* And now say, which of these two is most deserving of your choice, the way of sin or of holiness; that which leads to happiness, or that which goes down to misery? *Whoso findeth me,* says Wisdom, *findeth life, and shall obtain favour of the Lord. But he who sinneth against me, wrongeth his own soul: all they who hate me love death f.*

3. If we are any of us acquainted with the ways of wisdom, how thankful should we be to that kind and skilful hand, which hath led us into these peaceful and pleasant paths! The traveller who hath missed his way, and is in danger of being lost, feels no small joy at the sight of a guide; nor can he be enough grateful to the friendly stranger for conducting him safe, through an easy and cheerful road, to the place whither he is going. What sentiments then of love and gratitude should possess our breasts, when we reflect on the kind and seasonable interpositions of divine grace in our favour? We had not only missed our way, but were going down heedlessly, it may be presumptuously, the path which directly leads to destruction. In these sad circumstances did the blessed God pity us? Did he by his providence, by his word, and by the gracious influence of his Spirit, stop us in our career, convince us of our danger, point out the way to happiness, and guide our feet into it? Have we found it a pleasant path? Has he vouchsafed us his

a Isa. xxxv. 8. *b* Isa. xxxiii. 16. *c* Isa. xxxv. 6, 7.
d Psal. cxix. 54. *e* Rom. vi. 22. *f* Prov. viii. 35, 36.

presence and company therein? And are we in hopes ere long, of arriving at the celestial city, and there enjoying perfect and endless felicity? O what praise is due to his free and unmerited goodness! Free and unmerited I call it; for such we shall readily acknowledge it to be, when we reflect on our own folly and perverseness, when we cast our eyes on the miseries of those who are yet in their sins, and when we consider the amazing price of our redemption, and the various means by which we are formed and prepared for future happiness and glory. *Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits. Who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases. Who redeemeth thy life from destruction, who crowneth thee with loving kindness and tender mercies a. Who maketh thee to lie down in green pastures; who leadeth thee beside the still waters; and guides thee in the paths of peace and righteousness, for his name's sake b.*

4. Let us see to it that we forsake not these paths, which we have found to be thus cheerful and pleasant. Indeed it is hardly to be imagined that they who have enjoyed the comforts of religion, will ever deliberately consent to part with them on any worldly consideration whatever. *Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him*, says our Saviour, *shall never thirst c.* His eager and criminal gust for the things of this life, will be in a good degree subdued. And *having drunk* and relished the *old wine*, as it is elsewhere expressed, *he will not straightway desire new: for* it will never be his settled judgment, that *the old is better d.* Yet many temptations will arise in the course of our profession to divert our attention from the interesting concerns of religion, and to pall our appetite to its joys and pleasures. As we pass on our way, Satan and the world will use their utmost efforts to draw us again into the paths of vanity and sin. And what through the corruption of our own hearts, and the depression of our animal spirits on some occasions, we shall now and then be put to a stand to know what to do. It is therefore of great importance, that we are upon our guard against all these assaults of the enemy. To that end let us endeavour by frequent reasonings with ourselves, and by maintaining

a Psal. ciii. 2—4. b Psal. xxiii. 2, 3.
c John iv. 14. d Luke v. 39.

daily communion with God, to get our judgment and experience still more and more confirmed in this grand leading point, on which I have been discoursing, That *the ways of wisdom are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths peace.* Thus obstinately fixed in our attachments to religion, and thus feeling the comforts of it at our hearts, we shall not be easily moved from our stedfastness. But like the Samaritans we shall be able to say, *Now, we believe, not because of the saying* of this or the other person: *for we have heard* and conversed with *him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world a.* Let us also make it our fervent and constant request to him, who first led us into the paths of righteousness, to guide and guard our steps therein.

5. And lastly, If the way to heaven is so pleasant as hath been represented, let us think, and frequently think with ourselves, how pleasant the country must be to which it leads. It is not in my power fully to describe it, or in yours to frame an adequate idea of it. *Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man the things which God hath prepared for them that love him b.* Peace of conscience, a sense of God's favour, faith in his good providence, communion with heaven, and the hope of eternal life, are sources of real comfort to the Christian in his way through this world. But O how will they be refined and improved when he gets to that better world! While we are passing on towards our home, we are not without our refreshments and pleasures. Even the services themselves, which are required of us, however painful they may seem, bring their own reward with them. And though we may now and then be greatly dejected and cast down; yet at other seasons our hearts are revived and comforted. It is pleasant, fatigued and weary as we may sometimes be, to drink of the distant streams of that *river which makes glad the city of God;* to taste of the grapes of Eshcol; and from mount Pisgah to take a view of the good land. It is pleasant to converse with our guide about the way we are led, and the country to which we are going; and to join with our fellow travellers in the cheerful songs, with which they entertain one another in the house of their pilgrimage. It is pleasant, in a word, to antici-

a John iv. 42. b 1 Cor. ii. 9.

pate the joys of heaven, and by faith and hope, to transport ourselves for a while to that blissful place.

But O what are these comforts, what are these pleasures, when compared with those reserved for the weary pilgrim when he is got to his journey's end! *There remaineth a rest for the people of God a. In my Father's house*, says Christ, *are many mansions: I go to prepare a place for you b. The ransomed of the Lord shall return and come to Zion with songs, and everlasting joy upon their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away c.* What inconceivable pleasure will they feel, from the hearty welcome which the Lord Jesus Christ, and his attending saints and angels, will give them! What infinite satisfaction to find themselves instantly relieved of all their complaints! And what rapturous joys, at the prospect of those delightful and improving exercises of friendship and devotion, in which they are to be for ever employed! They are at home. O blessed state! The country is fair and fruitful. The inhabitants are all holy, peaceful and happy. God himself dwells among them; and in the enjoyment of his favour and presence they possess a never-ending duration of bliss and glory. *So shall they ever be with the Lord. Wherefore, comfort one another with these words d.*

DISCOURSE VIII.

THE FRUITS OF RELIGION.

ROM. VI. 22.——*Ye have your fruit unto holiness.*——

TRUE religion, wherever it prevails, infuses a certain vital heat or energy into the soul, which fails not to produce some substantial effects in a man's temper and conduct. It is however to be feared, that too many mistake the unhallowed flame of

a Heb. iv. 9. b John xiv. 2.
c Isa. xxxv. 10. d 1 Thess. iv. 17, 18.

mere natural passion, for this living principle of divine grace. Their imagination is pleased, and their affections warmed; and so they instantly conclude themselves men of religion. But alas! the genuine spirit of those truths for which they profess so high a regard is overlooked and forgot; and their zeal, like a flaming meteor, having for a while drawn the attention and wonder of all around them, suddenly expires in perpetual darkness and oblivion. Or if their pretensions to religion do not thus quickly vanish and die away; perhaps other consequences follow, which are still more fatal and dangerous. When the tumult of their passions is somewhat subsided, and they are pressed with the utility and importance of real holiness; they begin coolly to persuade themselves, that a profession of the gospel may consist with their lusts. Until at length it becomes a settled point with them, that they may be allowed to sin—horrid impiety!—because they are not under the law, but under grace.

Such kind of persons there were in primitive times; and this their unnatural abuse of the gospel, the apostle exposes at large in this context. Nor is it a little remarkable, that the manner in which he combats the false reasoning of these men, while it sets their perverseness and ingratitude in the most striking light, furnishes a strong presumptive evidence in favour of the doctrine of grace. *Shall we sin because we are not under the law, but under grace a?* As if he had said, "The constitution of the gospel is such, that it may seem at first view as if it countenanced sin. Men of corrupt minds may turn the grace of God, so amazingly displayed in the free pardon and justification of a sinner, into licentiousness. But be assured this is not the spirit, the tendency of that doctrine, which you have been taught; nor will it admit of any such conclusion. So far from it, that this very consideration of your not being under the law, but under grace, is a reason why sin should not have dominion over you." Nor does the apostle content himself with this general reasoning upon the matter; but appeals to the religious affections of their hearts, in support of his argument. They had felt the powerful influence of the gospel, to move them to obedience; and so had approved themselves real Chris-

a Ver. 15.

tians, men of sound and genuine religion. Whereas *ye were the servants of sin, ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you;* and so *being made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness a.* And then reminding them of the miserable fruits of that obedience they had formerly rendered to sin, even *shame* and *death*, he tells them in the text, the case was now happily altered; for *being delivered from* the dominion of *sin, and become servants to God, they had their fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life.*

The metaphorical phrase of *having fruit*, or *bearing fruit*, when applied to the actions of men, evidently supposes a certain principle from whence those actions proceed, and which gives them their true and proper denomination in the sight of God. Now as in the general, there will be a correspondence or similarity between the one and the other; so the course or tenor of a person's life is represented in scripture, as the best index of the state of his mind. Upon this maxim our Saviour reasons, when he would guard us against wicked and designing men, who, under pretence of extraordinary piety and goodness, attempt to deceive and mislead us. *By their fruits ye shall know them. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so, every good tree bringeth forth good fruit, but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit: neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit b.* It is God's prerogative alone to judge the heart; nay, as to the actions of others, we are very incapable in some instances of pronouncing decisively upon them, for want of clearly understanding the motives from whence they arise. But it is an unquestionable truth, that his heart cannot be right with God, the course of whose behaviour is unholy and sinful. And on the other hand, ignorant as we are of men's hearts, we are obliged to give full credit to their profession, if their conduct is answerable to it. And indeed a sense of our own liableness to err, and a disposition to think well of others, will induce us, if we are men of religion, to put a favourable construction on actions which are doubtful, and even in some respects blame-worthy.

Now the question is, What are those *fruits* we are to expect from a real Christian, and without which a man's pretensions to

a Ver. 17, 18. b Matt. vii. 15—18.

that character, be they what they may, are vain and groundless? The apostle comprehends them all in the general idea of *holiness*, a word of much the same import with *righteousness* in the preceding verses. It stands opposed to sin, and signifies a conformity of our tempers and lives to the will of God. When we speak of it as a principle, we mean a fixed approbation of the things which are excellent and good, and a prevailing inclination or tendency of the heart to those things. And when we speak of the fruits of it, we mean all those various acts of the mind and of the external conduct, which spring from this principle, and are in their nature and quality conformable to it.

Now the *holiness* of a Christian is at present, in neither of these views, perfect: far from it. His judgment indeed is firmly established in favour of that which is good, and his heart is strongly inclined that way. But still he hath many evil passions and propensities to struggle with. Hence the apostle complains of *a law in his members, warring against the law of his mind a:* and of *flesh lusting against the spirit b.* Nor is there a good man living, but daily laments, and often in the bitterness of his spirit, the folly and corruption he feels working within. The powers of sin and holiness, like the houses of Saul and David, are continually at war with each other. And of consequence, *the fruits of holiness*, that is, the various expressions of it in the thoughts and reasonings of the mind, and in the actions of the life, will be imperfect likewise. Hence the many weaknesses, failings and sins of those, who nevertheless, upon the whole, give satisfactory proof that their hearts are upright before God.

Thus much premised, I proceed now to describe the natural and genuine *fruits* of religion; and to shew you, as I go along, how they arise out of this principle of holiness, quickened and invigorated by the animating motives the gospel suggests. They are reducible to these three heads, the duties we owe—*to God*—*to one another*—and *to ourselves*. Let us,

I. Consider the several expressions of religion which are required of us *towards God*. The first I shall mention is,

First, Thinking of God.

a Rom. vii. 23. b Gal. v. 17.

God is the great object of religion, and they who enter into the spirit of it, are well affected towards him; or to use the language of Scripture, they have 'his fear in their hearts *a*.' Now a thoughtfulness about God, or the frequent adverting of the mind to him, is a natural expression of this fear. Nay, without such consideration of him, there cannot be that admiration of his excellencies, that confidence in his power and goodness, and that devotedness of heart to his service, which enter so deeply into the essence of religion, and are the chief sources of delight and pleasure to a renewed mind. It is the character of the wicked, that 'God is not in all their thoughts *b*.' They do indeed sometimes think of him, but it is sorely against their will, and upon those occasions only, when providence forces the idea of him upon their consciences. On the contrary, it is the character of the man of religion, that 'he sets the Lord always before him *c*.' He not only lays it down as a settled principle with him, that God sees him, and that therefore he ought to act as in his sight, but he is apt to think of him. His attention is quickly turned towards this great object, by circumstances which have not the like effect on other men.—Now there is a general and occasional recollection of God, and a more steady and particular contemplation of him; each of which is a natural and proper expression of religion.

1. As to the former. It is true we cannot be thinking of God every moment; that, as we are at present circumstanced, is impossible, nor is it indeed necessary. Yet there are many things continually occurring, which, if we are well affected towards him, will be likely to bring him to our remembrance. Our enjoyments and afflictions, our temptations and difficulties, our dangers and escapes, yea our follies and sins, will be apt to have this effect. The good man, sensible that he is a pensioner on the divine bounty, can scarcely feel the want of any blessing, or have that want agreeably supplied, without calling to mind his benefactor. Such pious reflections as were common with the good old patriarchs on these occasions, will every now and then pass across his breast.—*The God who hath fed me all my life long unto this day d!—The Lord who hath dealt graciously*

a Jer. xxxii. 40.
b Psal. x. 4.
c Psal. xvi. 8.
d Gen. xlviii. 15.

with me a!—How unworthy am I of the least of all his mercies b!—When he resolves upon transacting any important affair, he can hardly forbear saying with the apostle James, at least in his heart, *If the Lord will, I shall live, and do this or that c.* When any cross event happens to him, he quickly recollects that the hand of Providence is in it. Is David affronted by Shimei? how instantly does the thought occur! *The Lord hath bidden him d.* If any matter of difficulty arises, which requires extraordinary prudence and fortitude, he will naturally send up a wish to heaven, as did Nehemiah, while he stood before the Persian king *e.* Is he assaulted with temptation? the idea of that great Being who is every where present, will be apt to strike an awe upon his spirits, and he will silently reason with himself like Joseph, *How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God f?* Or if he has been overtaken with sin, the remembrance of God will follow close upon the remembrance of his sin; just as Peter, whenever he recollected his denial of Christ, recollected also the expressive look which Christ gave him, and which drew tears of genuine sorrow from his eyes *g.*

But it were endless to enumerate the various circumstances, which will lead a serious mind thus occasionally to think of God. Nor need I stay here to shew you, how naturally these thoughts and reflections on God, arise from that fear which he is said to put into the heart. They are as genuine expressions of religion, as, on the contrary, the frequent taking God's name in vain, which is no other than speaking without thinking of him, is an expression of profaneness and irreligion.—But it is farther to be observed, that the fear and love of God will incline the Christian,

2. To a fixed and close meditation of him on particular and special occasions. God is to be seen in all his works, whether of nature, providence or grace. But alas! how few observe him. Some are so continually busied about the affairs of the world, or so deeply immersed in sensual pleasures, that they consider not at all the operations of his hands. And others of a more refined taste, amidst their many curious and perhaps useful

a Chap. xxxiii. 11. *b* Chap. xxxiii. 10. *c* James iv. 15.
d 2 Sam. xvi. 11. *e* Neh. ii. 4. *f* Gen. xxxix. 9.
g Mark xiv. 72.

speculations, are unmindful of the first great Cause of all things. But it is not so with the man of religion. He is an enquirer after God, and cannot be content without finding him. Now, though 'God is not far from every one of us,' and, at the first glance on his works, we may perceive striking proofs of his power and goodness, yet *we must seek him, if haply we may feel after him, and find him a.* Divine knowledge, with all the happy fruits of it, is not to be attained without close attention and diligent application. *The works of the Lord are great, sought out of all them that have pleasure therein b.* Wherefore religion prompts the Christian to withdraw from the world at proper seasons, to impose silence on his tumultuous thoughts and passions, and so to engage his heart to approach unto God. A difficult work this often is, through various causes that might be mentioned, yet, in the issue, we shall find it infinitely profitable and entertaining. Nor should the consideration of God be confined to our retirements only. It should be the business of conversation, when a fit opportunity offers, and always our professed object, when we attend upon the solemnities of public and social worship.

Many examples of this sort we meet with in Scripture. *Enoch walked with God c,* that is, he thought of him, and conversed with him, as well as aimed to do his will. *Isaac went out into the field at eventide to meditate d*—to meditate doubtless of God and his works. The wakeful hours of the night, David employed in divine contemplation *e.* And his great object in frequenting the house of God was, that he might *behold the beauty of the Lord, enquire in his temple f,* and there be employed in *thinking of his loving kindness g.* Nor can you well forget how they are commended, who, in the time of the prophet Malachi, 'spake often one to another, and thought on the name of the Lord *h.*' Now this is a just and natural expression of real piety, as it evidently supposes a firm belief of God's existence and presence, a sincere and affectionate love to him, and a humble hope and confidence in his mercy, and

a Acts xvii. 27. *b* Psal. cxi. 2. *c* Gen. v. 22.
d Gen. xxiv. 63. *e* Psal. lxiii. 6. *f* Psal. xxvii. 4.
g Psal. xlviii. 9. *h* Mal. iii. 16.

as it plainly evinces an ardent concern to have these divine principles quickened and established in the heart.

Secondly, Addressing ourselves to God, is another eminent expression of religion.

A duty this, which the light of nature, as well as Scripture, clearly teaches. Prayer is the offering up our desires to God, and is generally considered as including in it, an acknowledgment of our dependence on God, and his infinite perfections, thankfulness for his various mercies, a confession of our manifold sins, and a supplication of all needful blessings for ourselves and others. I shall not enter into the many frivolous objections which have been made to this duty. The question as to the fitness or propriety of addressing the Deity, may be safely rested with the simple dictates and feelings of every man's reason and conscience. Besides, Scripture hath put the matter beyond all doubt with those who assent to its divine authority. —Now the qualifications of acceptable prayer are, either those which enter into the essence of it, or those which are only adventitious or circumstantial.

1. As to the former, they are these; a due regard to the Being whom we address, a proper sense of our own condition and wants, faith in the mediation of Christ, and a humble hope of the aid and influence of the Holy Spirit. He who prays aright, must have his thoughts reverently employed about God, and his mind suitably impressed, both with the greatness and goodness of that infinite Being. *He must believe that he is, and that he is the rewarder of them that diligently seek him*[a]. He must be deeply affected with his own frailty, guilt and unworthiness, with his absolute and entire dependence on God, with the excellence and importance of the great blessings he implores, and with a grateful remembrance of the many favours he hath received. He must have a lively and affectionate confidence in the merit and advocacy of Christ, for the success of his prayers. And while he humbly supplicates the assistance of the Holy Spirit, which is the chief good that God bestows, he must be sensible of his need of the divine influences, and of the encouragement given him to expect them. Now these tempers, suitably exercised in prayer, are the natural and pro-

[a] Heb. xi. 6.

per expressions of religion. Nor is there any one devout affection of the heart, but may be excited and gratified in the due practice of this duty. And then,

2. As to those other qualifications, which may, on some accounts, be called circumstantial, a due regard to them is a natural dictate of religion, and furnishes a clear proof of its prevalence in the heart. The man of religion will make conscience of secret prayer, sensible of his own immediate and personal concern with God, and desirous of using a freedom with him peculiar to such private intercourses. *Enter thou into thy closet*, says our Saviour, *and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret, and thy Father, who seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly a.* He will also consider himself obliged to social prayer, that is, to join with his family and his Christian friends, in solemn addresses to God. To which he will be prompted, by a firm persuasion of the importance of such exercises, not only to the interests of religion in general, but to his own personal edification and comfort. The primitive Christians 'continued with one accord in prayer and supplication *b*.' And the apostle exhorts the Hebrews 'not to forsake the assembling of themselves together,' with a view, doubtless, to this duty among others, 'as was the manner of some *c*.' He will pray frequently, urged to this exercise not by conscience only, but by the pleasure and profit resulting from it. 'Continue instant in prayer *d*.' 'Pray without ceasing *e*.' On certain occasions he will judge it his duty to set apart special time for humiliation and prayer, and for thanksgiving and praise; of which we have numerous examples both in the Old and New Testament. Nor will he be an utter stranger to those short, silent, ejaculatory addresses already hinted at; and which are not only in themselves most fit and reasonable, but are likewise recommended by several instances on divine record.

Now, a transient reflection on the genius and spirit of real religion will quickly convince us, that the addressing God after the manner which hath been represented, is a natural, and I may add, a necessary expression of its existence and prevalence in the heart. If breathing is a clear proof of animal,

a Matt. vi. 6. *b* Acts i. 14. *c* Heb. x. 25.
d Rom. xii. 12. *e* 1 Thess. v. 17.

so is prayer of spiritual and divine life. Nor is it easy to conceive how that man who is truly sensible of his dependence on God, and feels a cordial affection towards him, can pass on contentedly from day to day in the neglect of this duty; especially since God hath so solemnly enjoined it, and given so many encouragements to it.

THIRDLY, A due regard to public worship is another expression of religion.

Next to the existence of God, there hath not been one point more generally assented to, than that he ought to be worshipped. And since we all stand in the same relation to him, as reasonable and dependent creatures, and are under mutual obligations to each other, it is likewise agreed on all hands, that the worship of God should be public and social. Whence it happens, that go where we will, we see some place of general concourse devoted to the service of the Deity. Wherefore, they who treat public worship with contempt, or allow themselves in the neglect of it, act in direct opposition to one of the plainest dictates of reason, and to the common sense and profession of mankind.

But we are not left to the general reasonings of nature and conscience upon this matter. We have the express authority of Scripture to oblige us to obedience; and we have particular directions given us therein, as to the manner in which God will be worshipped. It was the practice of good men in the earliest ages of the world, 'to call upon the name of the Lord *a*.' And we hardly need be reminded, what particular regard was paid to this great duty, under the Jewish dispensation. The mode of worship, indeed, which then prevailed, is now changed. But social religion itself is as much in force as ever. Our Lord hath solemnly required his disciples to assemble for the worship of God. And his apostles have taken particular care, to caution them against indifference to the divine command. 'Where two or three,' says Christ, 'are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them *b*.' We are *to assemble*. This we are to do, be our situation, number, or outward circumstances what they may, provided it be any way practicable. We are to assemble *in the name of Christ*, that is, as Christians, in obedience to his command, and with a particular regard to him

a Gen. iv. 26. *b* Matt. xviii. 20.

in what we do. We are to meet together frequently, at stated seasons, and on every proper occasion that offers. And when we are thus convened, the services to be performed, as appears from the precepts and examples of the New Testament, are prayer and praise, instruction and exhortation, and the celebration of the two Christian institutions. Nor can I forbear adverting a moment to the gracious and condescending promise annexed, and which affords the noblest encouragement to social religion. *I am in the midst of them.* There is amazing dignity and goodness in the expression. "I their Almighty Saviour and friend am among them—among them, not as a witness only of what passes, but as one of the company, to gladden them with my presence, and to put life and pleasure into these divine exercises, by my influence and grace."

Now, who that considers the reasonableness of the service itself, the authority by which it is enjoined, and the infinite utility and pleasantness of it, when crowned with the enlivening presence of Christ, but must acknowledge that it is a very important branch of duty? Wherefore, a regular, serious and cheerful attendance upon it, is a just and natural expression of religion. A good man cannot allow himself in an habitual and wilful neglect of it. Nor can he be contented with mere forms, unanimated by the genuine spirit of vital godliness. He may not always have the like relish for devotional exercises, nor be always alike benefited by them; but it will be his grand object *to worship God, who is a Spirit, in spirit and truth* [a]. Whence it follows, that our regard to public worship, is one good criterion, among many others, by which to judge of the state of religion in our hearts. Again,

FOURTHLY, Obedience to the will of God is another eminent expression of religion.

It were endless to enumerate the various duties incumbent on us, and which arise out of the several relations in which Providence hath placed us. Be they, however, what they may, the will of God signified to us in various ways, is our grand obligation to the performance of them. But, alas! such is the weakness and degeneracy of human nature, that perfect obedience is absolutely unattainable in the present life. Wherefore, the

[a] John iv. 24.

question here is, What kind of obedience that is, which may be styled the genuine fruit of religion, or which is necessary to denominate a man a real Christian?

1. It is an obedience which hath an immediate respect to the will of God. Many there are, who, in some instances, do the thing which is right, while, at the same time, the divine authority is quite out of the question. They are wholly moved by interest, and perhaps worldly interest too. Now in actions of this sort there is nothing of religion. And upon this consideration, great numbers of a decent outward behaviour, are excluded from the denomination of good men. But there is an intimate and necessary connection between true morality and religion. The real Christian will have regard to God in his obedience. The question with him in every doubtful matter is, What God would have him to do? And with David he sincerely prays, *Teach me thy way, O Lord, and lead me in a plain path a.* And hence we commonly style such a person a conscientious man. Many indeed of the more plain and common offices of life, will be performed by him without his thinking immediately of God. Yet his regard to that great Being will clearly appear in those instances wherein his duty and interest clash; and in matters too which are out of the view of others, and wherein he cannot be influenced by motives of honour and applause. Again,

2. It is an obedience which springs from a love of God, and a desire to please him. Men who have no true sense of religion, may, nevertheless, have a regard to God in some of their actions. This is frequently the case. As particularly in those instances, wherein the evil avoided, is of such a nature, as to force upon the conscience a dread of the extraordinary displeasure of God. So the idea of God, in an oath, will oblige some men to speak the truth, who are not over-scrupulous of a falsehood on common occasions. In like manner, when persons are under convictions of sin, a regard to God, though their hearts are not really changed, will hold them back from many evils they have been used to commit, and prompt them, perhaps, to many good actions, which before this were wholly neglected. Herod was a wicked man, yet he *feared John, and observed*

a Psal. xxvii. 11.

him, and for a while *did many things a.* But in these cases, they are influenced by a slavish, not an ingenuous fear of God, as sufficiently appears from the unwillingness and irregularity of their obedience. Now the reverse of this is the characteristic of that obedience which religion teaches. It proceeds from love to God, from a sincere and ardent wish to please him, and from a clear conviction of the intrinsic excellence of real holiness. A good man accounts it his highest happiness to be like God, feels a real pleasure resulting from a sense of his favour, and is allured to a compliance with his duty in instances that are self-denying, by a recollection of God's mercies, especially that of his redemption by Jesus Christ. So the general course of his obedience is regular and cheerful. Which leads me to observe,

3. That it is universal. Many there are who would readily obey God in some instances, if they might be allowed to gratify their evil passions in others. And upon this principle, that a partial submission to the divine authority will be acceptable, we see them commuting with Heaven for grosser sins, by a few trifling acts of penance and self-denial. But it is otherwise with the real Christian. As his obedience is the fruit of love, so it hath regard to the whole will of God. *Then shall I not be ashamed,* said the psalmist, *when I have respect to* ALL *thy commandments b.* He can indeed keep none of them aright, that is, perfectly; yet he would gladly conform to every one of them. Follow him into his most secret recesses, and you will there find him under the influence of this principle, as well as in the midst of his worldly transactions. Look into his heart, if that might be, and you will see him deeply lamenting his vain thoughts, and irregular passions, as well as his external actual sins. And then again,

4. Sensible of the manifold imperfections attending his obedience, he renounces the most distant idea of meriting the favour of God thereby. He *does justice, and loves mercy,* but, at the same time, he *walks humbly with his God c:* and having *done all which was commanded him, he* readily acknowledges, that he is *an unprofitable servant d.* His salvation, he well

a Mark vi. 20. *b* Psal. cxix. 6.
c Micah vi. 8. *d* Luke xvii. 10.

knows, is of grace, through the sacrifice and righteousness a Christ. Wherefore he ventures not into the presence of God, with any other plea than that which his Almighty Saviour and Friend hath put into his lips.—Such is that general obedience to the will of God, which religion teaches. But the noblest expression of real piety, is,

FIFTHLY, and lastly, The using our endeavours to advance the glory of God in the world.

By glorifying God, I mean the displaying his perfections to the view of our fellow-creatures, in order to excite their reverence for God, and to animate them to his service. Now to this every Christian in his measure contributes, by walking agreeable to his profession. While our 'light so shines before men, as that they may see our good works, they will glorify our Father who is in heaven *a*.' But there is something more required of us, besides that general obedience I have been describing. We are to exert ourselves, as our abilities will admit, to spread the knowledge of the truth, to promote the cause of virtue and holiness, and to save men from temporal and everlasting ruin. The means indeed by which these great objects are to be attained, are too numerous to be particularly recited here; or I might tell you of the many private offices of Christian friendship we owe to each other, of the maintenance of family-religion, of the encouragement of public worship, and of the contriving and carrying into execution schemes of public and general utility. By their prudence, zeal and activity, some persons, and those too in no very eminent stations of life, have rendered amazing services to the interests of truth and religion. So that when Providence hath removed them hence, their names hath been embalmed in the breasts of thousands, who have reaped the happy fruit of their labours.

Now, such endeavours to glorify God are noble proofs of real religion. There can be no doubt but those are Christians indeed, who stand at a distance from sin, because it is displeasing to God, and who lament their daily infirmities, on this account chiefly, because he is dishonoured thereby. Who feel pain at their very hearts, when the gospel of Christ is reproached, through the ill conduct of any of its professors; and in the dust

a Matt. v. 16.

expostulate with God on these sad occasions, in the language of Joshua, *What wilt thou do, O Lord, unto thy great name a*? Who forget their own honour and interest, when those of God and religion are at stake; and who account it their highest felicity to be the instruments of spreading the truth, and of saving the immortal souls of men.

Thus have we considered the several *fruits of holiness*, which have an immediate respect to God. Let us now seriously examine ourselves upon these matters. Religion is an important reality. It does not consist in mere speculation and profession. It must, it will, wherever it prevails, produce suitable effects in men's tempers and lives. How stands it then with us?—Do we think of God?—Do we address ourselves to him?—Do we attend on his appointments?—Is it our concern to be obedient to his will?—And are we pleased with every opportunity that offers to advance his glory in the world?——Every good man will, I am sensible, have innumerable defects and imperfections to lament before God. But, if these matters are the objects of our attention and pursuit, we are Christians indeed; and *having* thus *our fruit unto holiness*, we shall have the testimony of those around us, that we are *the servants of God*.

PART II.

THE duties required of us *towards God* have been considered; and we now go on,

II. To the duties we owe *to one another*.

These, of whatever kind they may be, result from the several relations which Providence hath established among mankind; and approve themselves, upon due reflection, to every one's reason and conscience, as most fit and proper. Now they are all reducible to the general idea of *Justice*; which is therefore considered by some as *perfect* or *imperfect*. By perfect justice, is meant the rendering to every man what is strictly and truly his own. And by *imperfect justice*, the rendering him that good which is purely the effect of courtesy or kindness. The former he may demand; the latter is his due only upon the general principles of benevolence. But waving this distinction, and taking the general term of justice in its common acceptation; I

a Josh. vii. 9.

propose to discourse of the several social duties under the three heads of—*Justice*—*Peaceableness*—and *Goodness*;—and to shew you, as we go along, our obligations as Christians to these fruits of holiness. The subject is copious, I must therefore confine myself to the leading ideas only.

FIRST, *Justice.*

As man is made for society, we must of necessity have various mutual intercourses with each other. And as these intercourses are by *words* or *actions*, so justice requires that in the former we should have a strict regard to truth, and in the latter, to righteousness. We must render to every one his due. And what that is may be pretty easily known, if men will but listen to the dictates of reason and conscience. But, alas! it too often happens that reason is perverted by prejudice, and conscience overruled by interest. Admitting however that difficult cases may arise, yet there is a plain rule our Saviour hath laid down, which, if duly regarded, will scarcely ever fail of giving a right direction to our conduct. 'All things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them *a*.' It cannot be expected I should enumerate the various instances, to which this rule may be applied. Its use, however, in the general, will, upon the slightest reflection, clearly appear. Self-love makes men very jealous of their own rights, and very expert in fixing their own dues. We should therefore put ourselves in the place of him we are concerned with, and then ask what our demands would be. Such should be the practice of magistrates and people, of parents and children, of masters and servants, of the buyer and the seller. So should we be enabled to judge impartially what is our duty in every relation of life. Nor would it be possible for us, did we thus judge, to err widely from the path of righteousness.

But the matter lies chiefly with conscience. For acts of injustice proceed more commonly from the depravity of the heart, than any defect in the judgment. If the mind is well principled, there will be a uniform and steady regard to truth and justice, in the general course of a person's conduct. A man of religion hath a court of equity established in his own breast, whose authority will extend to all his actions—to those which are not

a Matt. vii. 12.

cognisable by the civil magistrate, as well as those which are. He will not allow himself in any thing which appears to him unjust, though the doing it may expose him to no temporal inconvenience whatever. Nay, in matters that are doubtful, he will choose to give the turn of the scale rather in favour of his neighbour than of himself.—Now for the illustration of the several duties of truth and righteousness, let us consider them in reference—to the *persons*—the *properties*—and the *characters* of our fellow-creatures.

1. As to their *persons*. Justice requires that we be harmless and inoffensive, decent and civil, in our behaviour towards all men. We are to be careful that we do nothing whereby our neighbour may be injured, in his body or his mind, directly or indirectly, by any immediate act of violence, or by our ill advice, example or influence. But on the contrary, we are to shew him all the regard that is his due, that is, to contribute what lies in our own power to the health, ease and prosperity, both of his outward and inward man. When we see him in any danger, we are to rescue him from it. And when we have an opportunity to do him any real service, we are cheerfully to embrace it. And our obligations thus to act towards individuals, are to be estimated by the nearness of our relation to them, by the particular situation we happen to be in, and by the abilities and influence we possess.

2. As to our neighbour's property. Justice requires that we defraud no man of his substance, either by open violence, or by art and collusion; but that we *render to every one his due, tribute to whom tribute, custom to whom custom, fear to whom fear, honour to whom honour* is due. We are to *owe no man any thing a*; but *to have a good conscience, in all things willing to live honestly b*. The magistrate is to protect the subject in the enjoyment of his liberty and property; and the subject is to do all proper homage to the magistrate, and to support and assist him in the execution of his office. The servant is to act with all fidelity towards his master's interest; and the master is properly to reward the servant's labour and integrity. And so persons in trade and business are to keep their contracts inviolable, and not to over-reach or deceive one another; but in all their

a Rom. xiii. 7, 8. b Heb. xiii. 18.

transactions, to do as they would be done by. Thus we are to be true to our engagements, faithful to our trusts, and fair in our dealings.—There is a justice also due to our benefactors, which is to be expressed by a grateful acknowledgment of the favours we have received, and every suitable return our circumstances will admit of. And then again,

3. As to the characters of men: an equitable regard is to be paid to them. Too many there are, who though they dare not rob their neighbour of his substance, yet do not think much of taking from him his good name. But if a good name is better than precious ointment, if it is more valuable to an honest man than any worldly possession whatever, yea I may add, than life itself; to deprive him of it, or to take measures to that purpose, is an act of the most cruel and atrocious injustice. The man of religion therefore, will be so far from bearing false witness against another, that he will be cautious how he insinuates any thing to his disadvantage. Nay, he will be inclined to put a favourable construction upon actions that are doubtful, and even upon those which may be in some respects blameworthy. *Put them in mind*, says the apostle to Titus, *to speak evil of no man* a.

And now, methinks, I hardly need remind you of the mighty influence of real religion, to produce these fruits of righteousness in our tempers and conduct towards each other. Wherever that prevails, there will most certainly be a principle of truth and justice deeply rooted in the heart. And that will secure a man, not only from what is strictly unjust and wicked, but from what is mean and base. A fraudulent, oppressive and ungenerous action, he will detest, while, on the contrary, he will take the highest pleasure in actions that are just, honourable and good. As to the injuries which men offer to one anothers' persons, they are usually the effect of undue anger and resentment. But the grace of God will teach and enable the Christian to check and restrain his tumultuous passions, and so to forbear the consequences of them. Covetousness is the source of all the dishonesty and fraud there is in the world. It puts men upon invading each others property, and eagerly grasping at every opportunity, however unfair, of becoming rich. But religion will mortify our hearts to the world, or at least so far bridle our

a Tit. iii. 2.

covetous desires, as effectually to secure us from doing injustice to our neighbour's property. In a word, envy and malice are the true causes of slander and detraction, and of all that cruel abuse which is sometimes offered to innocent and virtuous characters. But here also religion will have its influence. It will subdue these diabolical passions, and so prevent the injury which may thence result to our neighbour's reputation.

And then the considerations which religion suggests to the mind in favour of truth and justice, are of the most persuasive and animating nature. The ever-blessed God is 'a God of truth, and without iniquity: just and right is he *a*.' 'Justice and judgment are the habitation of his throne: mercy and truth go before his face *b*.' Striking displays he has given of these his perfections, in various instances of his conduct towards mankind; but especially in our redemption by Jesus Christ. An event which is the astonishment of angels as well as men! In order to secure the rights of his government, and to make way for the return of the Holy Spirit to these temples he had righteously forsaken; he sent his Son into our world, to obey the law we had broken, and to suffer the penalties of it in his own person on the cross. What an amazing expression of justice was this! God has thus *declared his righteousness for the remission of sins c*. He has told us, with a voice which speaks louder than that which condemned legions of rebel-angels to chains of darkness and fire, that *he is just* while *he justifies him who believes in Jesus d*. And who can give full credit to this, and not feel the warmest resentments kindled in his breast, at the very idea of fraud, oppression and injustice?

This same Jesus also, who was thus the minister of God's justice, did himself, while here on earth, set the fairest pattern of truth and righteousness. So far was he from injuring any man's person, that *he neither strove nor cried, nor was his voice heard in the streets e*. *He rendered to Cæsar the things that were Cæsar's, and to God the things that were God's f*. And *there was no guile*, no falsehood or detraction, *found in his mouth g*. And if we view him in the character of Mediator, presiding over the kingdom of providence and grace; we shall see him

a Deut. xxxii. 4. *b* Psal. lxxxix. 14. *c* Rom. iii. 25. *d* Rom. iii. 26.
e Matt. xii. 19. *f* Mark xii. 17. *g* 1 Pet. ii. 22.

swaying his sceptre with truth and justice. *He judges the people with righteousness, and the poor with judgment a.* In a word there is *a day* coming *in which* we are assured *he will judge the world in righteousness b.* A day wherein he will bring every secret thing to light, will weigh the characters of men in a just balance, and dispense rewards and punishments to all, with an equal hand.—What powerful considerations are these to influence the tempers and regulate the conduct of all such who are Christians indeed! Let us now proceed to the next branch of social duty I proposed to explain and enforce. And that is,

SECONDLY, *Peaceableness.*

By peaceableness I mean a disposition to live upon terms of friendship and good-will with all around us, and the use of proper endeavours to that end. This indeed is an object which, however desirable, cannot always be attained. Whence the apostle says, *If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men c.* So violent, in some instances, are the prejudices of the wicked against those of the opposite character, that it is not in the power, either of prudence or good nature, to subdue their cruel and unreasonable resentments. What we have therefore to do in these cases is, to detach ourselves from all connections with such persons. And if still we cannot escape their malevolence, we are to endure it with patience. As to some good men likewise, it is possible that their natural tempers, and an obstinate attachment to some peculiarities of their own, may forbid our having a strict intimacy with them. We are however to cherish good-will towards them, and to be ready on all occasions to do them offices of kindness.—There are instances also, in which it is unlawful to cultivate peace with others. This is the case when peace is not to be enjoyed, but at the expence of truth and holiness. The dearest connections are to be sacrificed, rather than sin indulged. And truth having been once bought, is to be parted with on no consideration whatever. Yet we should not forget in the former instance, to mingle charity with justice; and in the latter, moderation with zeal.

a Psal. lxxii. 2. b Acts xvii. 31. c Rom. xii. 18.

Thus much premised, I go on now to explain and illustrate the two main expressions of this temper. They are these—the living in peace ourselves—and the promoting it as much as possible among others.

1. The good man will himself cultivate peace with all around him—with men in general, but especially with his relations and his fellow-Christians. He will *seek peace and pursue it a.* To this end, he will carefully avoid giving offence to any, by an unsuitable behaviour towards their persons, their properties, or their reputation. So the apostle admonishes the Corinthians, *to give none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God.* And the admonition he enforces with his own example, *Even as I please all men in all things, not seeking mine own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved b.* That is, he endeavoured to accommodate himself to all, in matters that were indifferent, and so far as was consistent with a good conscience. The peaceable man will study the capacities, tempers and circumstances of others, and suit himself to them accordingly. He will lay a restraint on his passions, and exercise forbearance and self-denial, for the sake of peace. So did Abraham, upon occasion of a dispute between his servants and Lot's, which had like to have broke the harmony that subsisted between the two families. He said to Lot, *Let there be no strife, I pray thee, between me and thee; for we are brethren. If thou wilt take the left hand, then I will go to the right; or if thou depart to the right hand, then will I go to the left c.* And if it so happens that his brother is offended with him, though without cause, he will feel pain till the difference is composed.

And as he will be thus cautious how he gives offence, so he will not be forward to take it. He will be apt to put the most favourable construction on the words and actions of others, and not hastily to conclude, when he hath received an injury, that it was intended. He will *suffer long*, and *not be easily provoked d.* Or if the affront be real and wilful, he will not be implacable. The wisdom *that is from above, is peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated e.* But of the duty of forgiveness we shall have

a Psal. xxxiv. 14. *b* 1 Cor. x. 32, 33. *c* Gen. xiii. 8, 9.
d 1 Cor. xiii. 4, 5. *e* James iii. 17.

occasion to speak afterwards.—Such is the temper and conduct of the peaceable Christian, in regard of his own personal connections. In like manner,

2. He will endeavour to the utmost of his power, to promote peace among others. *Blessed are the peace makers*, says our Saviour, *for they shall be called the children of God a.*

Unity among his own immediate friends and acquaintance, it will be his aim to preserve, and when it is at all broke in upon, to restore. To this purpose, he will carefully avoid every thing which may tend to set persons at variance, or may, though undesignedly, inflame their passions and resentments. He will not busy himself in the affairs of others, or officiously intermeddle with their disputes. The character of such unhappy and dangerous persons, the apostle particularly describes in one of his epistles. 'They learn to be idle, wandering about from house to house; and not only idle, but tatlers also, and busy bodies, speaking things which they ought not *b*.' And yet every proper opportunity to compose differences, he will readily embrace, using all the prudence, tenderness and influence he is master of, to that end. He will labour to convince the parties concerned, of the great folly and evil of contention, of their obligations to peace, and of the honour they will gain by mutual submission and forgiveness. He will persuade them to avoid repeating grievances, to set as much as possible down to the account of misunderstanding, and to put the most favourable construction upon doubtful circumstances. And, in a word, he will observe inviolable secrecy, remembering what the wise man says, *A whisperer separateth chief friends c?* and, *Where there is no tale-bearer, the strife ceaseth d.*

He will likewise use his endeavours to cultivate and promote peace in the church of God. The importance of this to general edification, the apostle represents in several of his epistles, exhorting Christians *to follow after the things which make for peace e*; and *to keep the unity of the spirit, in the bond of peace f.* To this end he will pray for the peace of Jerusalem. He will set a peaceable example before others. He will countenance every thing which tends to promote union and friendship. He

a Matt. v. 9. *b* 1 Tim. v. 13. *c* Prov. xvi. 28.
d Chap. xxvi. 20. *e* Rom. xiv. 19. *f* Eph. iv. 3.

will take pains, as far as his influence reaches, to suppress jealousies, uneasinesses, and contentions, in their first appearance. And if yet the peace of the community is disturbed, he will interpose his best offices of counsel and persuasion, to heal the breach, and to restore harmony and love.

And then again, the preservation of the public peace, is an object to which he will contribute what lies in his power. Considering government as an ordinance of God, he will hold it his unquestionable duty, to render all proper submission to it. Obedience he will cheerfully yield to the higher powers, in every matter which consists with the allegiance he owes to Heaven: and that *not only for wrath's sake*, that is, in order to avoid the displeasure of the magistrate, *but for conscience sake* a. And, for the same reason, he will labour to promote loyalty, fidelity and union, among his fellow-subjects.—These are the main expressions of a peaceable disposition.

And now let me shew you in a few words, how true religion assists us in the practice of these duties, and by what considerations it excites us to them.

It assists us in these duties, by inspiring us with *prudence* to govern and regulate our conduct. He who is well skilled in self-knowledge, will derive thence the most important maxims, cautions, and directions, to guide him in all his social intercourses. And these will be of no small use to guard him against strife and contention, if not to qualify him for the difficult office of making peace.—*Humility* is an eminent branch of religion. And how this tends to promote peace I hardly need say. Pride usually goes before contention, is the cause of it, mingles itself with it, and hath the main influence to foment and increase it. Humility, on the contrary, wherever it prevails in all its genuine simplicity, precludes occasion for strife, or if strife is kindled, by its kind and gentle offices quickly puts it out.—*Contentment* is another Christian grace. And its effect on the matter now before us, is not one of the least advantages which result from it. While an ambitious, covetous, restless spirit, by prompting persons to improper and dangerous pursuits, almost unavoidably hurries them into disputes, an easy, quiet, contented temper, keeps

a Rom. xiii. 5.

the good man out of the way of these evils, or if he does at any time fall into them, enables him quickly to extricate himself. He hath not those eager expectations to gratify, and so being contented, is peaceable.—*Meekness* also is an amiable fruit of religion. And its direct tendency to beget and promote peace, appears at first view. There would be no contentions and divisions, if it were not for that sharp, angry, fierce temper, which is too common to mankind, and which is apt to be excited and provoked by disappointment or contradiction. This it is that kindles the flame, this that spreads it, and this that often renders every endeavour to quench it ineffectual. But the grace of God restrains this impetuous passion, yea corrects and softens it. It infuses, at least in a degree, a certain mildness and sweetness into a man's disposition, which prevents his wilfully offending another, and enables him to bear injuries, to put up with them, and to forgive them.—*Love* is also another genuine fruit of the Spirit. And among the many expressions of this divine temper, that of peace is not an inconsiderable one. Good-will to others will not allow me to quarrel with them, if I can any way help it. And cordial affection to them will, in a manner, render me incapable of contention; or at least of such contention with them, as shall have a mixture of malevolence in it. It will shut up the avenues of the heart against jealousy and suspicion. Or if they force their way, it will put me upon contriving every possible means to elude and escape them. Or if after all, I am really injured, love will make the breach occasioned thereby, more intolerable than the injury itself. 'Charity suffereth long, and is kind; is not easily provoked; thinketh no evil; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things *a*.'—In a word, that *zeal* for the glory of God, which religion inspires, will have a mighty effect to aid the Christian in the practice of this duty. He who makes peace his object, purely from a principle of self-love, and an aversion to noise and clamour, will sometimes find his natural easiness of disposition, mastered by the contrary passions of anger and ill-will. But here religion will step in to the relief of the Christian, just beaten and subdued. "Shall I yield to the unpeaceful resentments of my breast? No. The glory

a 1 Cor. xiii. 4, 5, 7.

of God, the honour of my profession, the interest of my fellow-Christians, are all concerned in the issue of this quarrel. *The kingdom of God is* in *peace*, as well as *righteousness a*. I will therefore submit." And by submitting he conquers.—Thus is a peaceable temper, the natural and genuine fruit of a principle of religion in the heart.

Nor should I forget to mention the motives which religion suggests, to excite us to the practice of this duty. God is a God of peace. Christ is the Prince of peace. The message he brings us from heaven, is of the most kind and peaceful intention. In order to make peace between God and us, he became an inhabitant of this quarrelsome world, submitted to a thousand indignities from the sons of strife, endured the contradiction of sinners against himself, and offered his life a sacrifice to divine justice. And thus in him we see righteousness and peace embracing and kissing each other. At his entrance into the world, the friendly angels sung, *Peace on earth, and good-will to men b*. During his stay therein, he set the most amiable example of peace and gentleness before his followers, bidding them learn of him, for he was meek and lowly in heart. And at his departure out of the world, he broke down the wall of partition between Jew and Gentile, reconciling them to God, and to each other, in one body by the cross. To promote this great design of peace, he is gone up, in our nature, into heaven, hath taken the affairs of providence into his hands, erected his kingdom in the hearts of his people, and promised them the spirit of peace and consolation. This temper I have been describing, is represented in Scripture as one of the fruits of the Spirit, and religion as consisting much in the practice of it. 'The wisdom from above, is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated; and the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace, of them who make peace *c*.' On the contrary, 'the having bitter envying and strife in our hearts,' is said 'to descend not from above, but to be earthly, sensual, and devilish *d*.' Innumerable advantages result from the cultivation of peace, to individuals, families, societies, and kingdoms. 'Behold how good and pleasant it is, for brethren to dwell together in unity *e*!'

a Rom. xiv. 17. *b* Luke ii. 14. *c* James iii. 17, 18.
d Ver. 14, 15. *e* Psal. cxxxiii. 1.

They who possess this happy temper, 'are the children of God *a*.' And to them are promised all the joys and pleasures of the heavenly world, where perfect union and undissembled friendship for ever reign. What powerful arguments these to persuade us to a peaceable temper and conduct!—It remains now that we consider those duties which are comprehended in the idea,

THIRDLY, Of *Goodness*. A general term this which is applicable to all acts of *Forgiveness*—*Compassion*—and *Love*.

1. *Forgiveness*. I mention this expression of goodness first, because the object towards which it is extended is the least deserving of it.

I must not stay here to enumerate the various kinds of injuries we may suffer from others. It should however be observed, that they *all* come within the view of the duty I am recommending. What I mean is, that the greatness of an offence will not itself justify our being implacable to the offender. It should also be remarked, that through weakness, partiality to ourselves, and the violence of irregular passions, we frequently err in our account of injuries. That is, we sometimes imagine ourselves injured, when we really are not: we sometimes impute the evil we suffer to a false cause, or to the wrong author: we sometimes hastily conclude it to be designed, when it was owing merely to mistake; and we sometimes rate the offence done us too high, and take not into our view those considerations, which would greatly mitigate and soften it. Now these matters should all be well weighed, in order to regulate our temper and conduct towards him we are required to forgive.

But admitting that we are really injured, and in a high degree, the question arises, What is our duty towards him who hath so injured us? I answer, To forgive him. There are, however, certain qualifications of forgiveness, which should here be mentioned.

As to those who are not sensible of the wrong they have done us, and so do not repent of it, nor make any retaliation for it; there is a sense in which *they* are to be forgiven. Revenge is a malignant temper, and is in no case to be allowed. The reverse of this, therefore, our Saviour teaches his disciples, in his sermon on the mount *b*; desirous that they should excel in that

a Matt. v. 9. *b* Matt. v. 38—41.

mild and gentle disposition, of which he was so fair a pattern. And the apostle charges us not *to avenge ourselves*, but *rather to give place to wrath a*. It may indeed be necessary for the public good, that some kinds of injuries should be prosecuted with rigour. Yet even in such instances there should be no mixture of personal malice or resentment. But where this is not necessary, and the injury is of a more private nature, the duty required of us is to lay a restraint upon our passions, and to preserve, as much as possible, the calm possession of ourselves. We are to exercise forbearance, and to make all reasonable allowance for natural temper, provocation, and other circumstances which may have given occasion to the offence. Mild and prudent methods are to be taken, to convince the offender, and to bring him to a sense of his evil. And though he is not to be wrought upon by any of these measures, we are, nevertheless, to wish him well, and to persevere in our endeavours to do him good. *If thine enemy hunger, feed him: if he thirst, give him drink b*. So David overcame Saul. And so the forgiving grace of God overcomes the rebellious hearts of sinners.

And then, as to such who are really sorry for the injury they have done us, and sincerely wish to be reconciled to us, we are cordially and cheerfully to forgive them; that is, to pass over the offence, and to be upon the same terms with them as before. *If thy brother repent*, says our Saviour, *forgive him c*. "Instead of taking any advantage against him, or reproaching him with his faults, or insisting upon hard terms of agreement, meet him, embrace him, rejoice over him, and be henceforth in perfect amity and friendship with him." So should we *comfort him*, to use the language of the apostle, in a case of a different kind, *lest he be swallowed up with over-much sorrow*; and so should we *confirm our love towards him d*. Nor is the repetition of an injury any reason why it should not be pardoned, provided our brother acknowledges it, and is sorry for it. *If he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him e*.

a Rom. xii. 19. b Rom. xii. 20. c Luke xvii. 3.
d 1 Cor. ii. 7, 8. e Luke xvii. 4.

And now, what powerful motives does religion suggest to animate us to the practice of this duty! The light of nature teaches it, and by many arguments enforces it. It is a striking passage of the famous heathen emperor and philosopher, "Do the immortal gods, for so many ages, not only patiently bear with the sinners that ever have been, many and great as they are, but also do them good in every possible way? and dost thou, who art but for a moment, think it hard to bear with them, and that, notwithstanding, thou art thyself one of them *a*?" But such is the darkness and perverseness of the human mind, that the reasonings of philosophy upon this point, have often proved imperfect and erroneous, feeble and ineffectual. The gospel, however, not only sets the duty of forgiving our enemies in its proper light, but furnishes a motive to excite us to it, which is peculiar to itself, and of the most generous and animating nature. *Be ye kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you b.* How plain and simple the exhortation! How noble and divine the argument with which it stands enforced! God forgives the greatest offenders, and innumerable offences. He forgives most heartily and sincerely, yea he takes pleasure in forgiving. He forgives men for the sake of Christ his Son, whose sufferings and death he hath accepted as a compensation for their offences. And he not only remits the punishment due to them, but receives them into his favour, treats them as his friends, and delights in doing them good. So that his conduct serves both for a rule to direct us in our duty, and a motive to influence us to it. And what an amazing effect has it had, in some instances especially, to soften men's resentments against each other, and to melt their hearts into tenderness and love! The compassionate Jesus also hath set us an example of forgiveness, as well as recommended it by his instructions. *Father*, said he when expiring on the cross, *forgive them, for they know not what they do c.* Nor should I forget to observe, that this temper arises out of the nature of true religion, is one of the fruits of the Spirit, and furnishes a striking proof, where it prevails, of our having *passed from death to life.*

a Marc. Anton. lib. vii. *b* Eph. iv. 32. *c* Luke xxiii. 34.

2. *Compassion.* This is another expression of goodness; and the duties of it rise in respect of their obligation, because the objects of compassion are to be considered, not like those of forgiveness, in the character of offenders, but purely as afflicted and miserable.

Now compassion is that affection of the mind by which we feel the distresses of our fellow-creatures, and become disposed to assist and relieve them. Various are the *temporal* calamities to which mankind are liable. Here we shall see one reduced, perhaps on a sudden, from circumstances of affluence and honour, to the depths of poverty, want and wretchedness;—there another lamenting the untimely dissolution of his dearest and most intimate connections in life;—and there a third racked with excruciating pains of body, or languishing on a bed of sickness and death. And what are the offices of mercy in these and other sad instances that might be described? The man of this temper feels with the miserable what they feel; and if he can do no more, drops a tender tear of commiseration over their pains and sorrows, and mingles therewith his fervent cries to Heaven on their behalf. But if he has it in his power, he instantly stretches forth the hand of benevolence, and gratifies one of the most pleasing affections of the human heart, by ministering to their wants. *He will not say to a brother or sister that is naked and destitute of daily food, Depart in peace, be thou warmed and filled; and* at the same time, *give them not those things which are needful to the body a.* Mercy is full of good fruits. She will feed the hungry, clothe the naked, visit the sick, and, according to her ability, afford succour to every kind of distress. Nor can the offices of mercy be better described than in the language of Job: 'When the ear heard me, then it blessed me. When the eye saw me, it gave witness to me; because I delivered the poor that cried, and the fatherless, and him that had none to help him. The blessing of him that was ready to perish came upon me, and I caused the widow's heart to sing for joy. I put on righteousness, and it clothed me; my judgment was as a robe and a diadem. I was eyes to the blind, and feet was I to the lame; I was a father to the poor, and the cause that I knew not I searched out; and I brake

a James ii. 15, 16.

the jaws of the wicked, and plucked the spoil out of his teeth *a*.'

Mercy hath respect also to the *spiritual*, as well as temporal distresses of mankind. And these are great—they are many. How sad a sight to behold a soul, an immortal soul, a soul of more worth than the whole world, in danger of perishing for ever! A soul capable of the knowledge of God, and yet wholly ignorant of him!—formed for substantial pleasures, and yet destitute of any relish for them!—appointed to perpetual existence, and yet without a hope, a wish, a thought beyond the grave!—on the brink of eternity, and yet secure and easy!—in a word, laden with guilt, and yet fearless of punishment! So sad a sight as this, when beheld with a steady eye, cannot fail to pierce the heart of the compassionate Christian. Viewing a friend, a brother, a child in these deplorable circumstances; he sheds tears of real sorrow over him, addresses his fervent cries to God for him, and most ardently wishes, by his counsel, influence and example, to become the happy instrument of his salvation. Such was the temper which inspired the breast of the great apostle, and expressed itself in those memorable words respecting the Jews, 'My heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they may be saved *b*.'—'I have great heaviness, and continual sorrow in my heart. For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ, for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh *c*.' Thus have I delineated the features of this amiable grace, and pointed out the several duties it teaches and inculcates.

Nor need I take pains to shew you, that these various offices of mercy are the proper and genuine fruits of religion. To be humane and compassionate is a dictate of nature—a principle so generally approved, that few care openly to renounce it. Nay, some men who are otherwise of a dissolute character, have very tender feelings for the distressed. But how is the natural sympathy of the heart refined and improved, by a deep sense of religion, and a firm belief of the great truths it reveals? God is *merciful*. We have daily convincing proofs of it. His providence kindly sustains us amidst all the miseries we suffer, and compassionately protects us from a thousand dangers to

a Job xxix. 11—17. *b* Rom. x. 1. *c* Rom. ix. 2, 3.

which we are every moment exposed. Yet these expressions of divine mercy, great as they are, vanish as it were into nothing, when compared with THAT which fills the breasts of millions of sinners with unspeakable admiration and joy. *For the great love wherewith he loved us, he spared not his own Son, but delivered him up* unto death for our sakes, *that we might not perish, but have everlasting life* a. Think of this, Christians, believe it, feel the blessings which result from it; and be unmerciful if you can—you cannot. For he *who is* thus *rich in mercy hath quickened you, when ye were dead in trespasses and sins* b; and this temper—these duties I have been recommending are the natural, the spontaneous acts of that new life ye now live. *Ye are followers of* the merciful *God, as dear children* c; and are *conformed to the image of his Son*, who is *full of grace and truth* d.—It remains now that I briefly enumerate those duties which fall under the idea,

3. Of *Love*. And these are of the most exalted nature, and of the strongest obligation. For the objects of this species of goodness have something farther to recommend them to our regard, besides the consideration of want or misery. Not to speak here of such whose amiable qualities of a natural kind can scarcely fail of attracting our regards; there are those who stand entitled to our cordial affection and confidence, as possessing the nobler gifts of virtue and religion. These having the image of the blessed God enstamped upon them, and being the real friends and brethren of Christ, are *the excellent of the earth*. Besides, therefore, the respects which are due to them in common with the rest of our fellow-creatures, and on account of the afflictions they may happen to endure, it is our unquestionable duty to esteem and honour them, to embrace them in the arms of cordial friendship and love, to associate with them, to pray daily for them, and to make a point of it to promote their interests, both civil and religious, in every way we are able. Are they happy? we are to rejoice with them. Are they in distress? we are to sympathise with them. Are they in want? we are to relieve them. Are they in danger? we are to protect them. To our counsel, assistance and support, they, above all

a Rom. viii. 32.—John iii. 16.
b Eph. ii. 4, 5.
c Eph. v. 1.
d Rom. viii. 29.—John i. 14.

others, stand entitled. But it were endless to enumerate the various offices which Christian love and friendship demand. It may, however, be proper here to throw out some general hints, for the regulating our acts of charity and benevolence.

They should be as extensive as possible. It is unworthy of a Christian to confine his regards to those good men only, who are exactly of the same opinion or denomination with himself. And it is a reflection on his prudence, to be so unreasonably liberal to a few, as to put it out of his power to assist others.—Yet justice, as well as charity, require, that our family, our acquaintance, and those of the same community, should take place of strangers, though, in point of character, they are all equally deserving.—A regard should be had also to the particular exigencies of our Christian brethren; the greatest and most pressing have clearly the first and largest claim to our assistance.—Nor should we forget their stations, abilities and usefulness, since the proportioning our liberality by this rule, is not only in itself reasonable, but tends greatly to extend its utility. Much there is likewise in a kind, obliging, and affable manner of conferring favours on those we love; for hereby their value and acceptableness are not a little heightened and increased: but what should above all be most regarded, is the principle by which we are actuated in these various duties. A sincere desire to please God, to express our love to Christ, and to do our brother real good, should be the governing motive of our conduct.

And now, can it be questioned, whether these are the natural and proper fruits of religion? The character of the blessed God, who is never weary of doing good; the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath enriched us at the expence of the deepest poverty; the reasonings and persuasions of the Bible; and the examples of the wisest, best and happiest men, all proclaim aloud our obligations to these great duties. Nor is there a Christian living, whose heart is impressed with that *love which passeth knowledge*, and who recollects the refined pleasure he has often felt in doing good, but will, with all the powers of his soul, echo back his loud *Amen*.

Thus have we considered the duties which are required of us

towards one another, and which are to be practised by us in the several relations wherein Providence hath placed us. And now, what think we of them? how stand we disposed to them? and what is the general tenor of our conduct? Is it our aim *to do justice, to love mercy*, and *to follow peace with all men*? and amidst all, *Do we walk humbly with God a*? blushing at our innumerable imperfections, in the presence of that infinitely holy Being, and placing all our hope of acceptance with him, on the mediation, sacrifice and righteousness of the great Emmanuel? Is this, I say, our temper? and under the influence of these principles, is it our concern to live and act?—Then are we Christians indeed.

PART III.

We have seen what are the proper expressions of religion towards God, and towards our neighbour. It remains that we consider,

III. The several duties we owe *to ourselves.*

Now these duties, which I propose briefly to enumerate and explain, result from our natural frame and constitution, as consisting of soul and body; from the connection of these two constituent parts of man with each other; and from our relation to the present state, and to that which will succeed it in the world to come. Wherefore two things are necessary in order to our having a clear idea of these duties, and in order to the proper discharge of them. The one is—*A due knowledge of ourselves.* And the other—*A right judgment of our true interests.* Each of these the real Christian possesses. The grace of God leads him into an acquaintance with himself, shews him wherein his happiness consists, and fixes upon his heart a lively sense of the vast importance of his future and everlasting concerns. Yet these are matters in which the best of us are but imperfectly versed. A care, therefore, to improve herein, may be considered as a primary duty, and indeed as a necessary mean, to those other duties of which I am presently to discourse. For this reason it will be proper to touch briefly upon each of these points, before we proceed to what we have chiefly in view.

1. As to *the knowledge of ourselves.*

a Micah vi. 8.

When I say *ourselves*, I mean human nature in general, and each one of us in his own state and character in particular.—It should be our concern to know *in general* what man is, as consisting of soul and body; what are his several powers, duties, interests and ends of existence: what he once was, when he first came out of the hands of his Creator; and what he now is, in his present fallen and depraved condition: what are the means provided for his recovery from these sad circumstances: what is his proper business during his short continuance in this life; and what are his prospects as to a future world.—And then as to ourselves *individually*; it should be our concern to know, not the state of our bodies or of our animal nature only, but of our minds. And here the object should be, not merely to come at a just idea of the strength, degree and extent of our intellectual powers, or of the taste, complexion and bent of our natural tempers, (the knowledge of which hath undoubtedly its use,) but chiefly to get a clear view of the true state of our hearts, what are our prevailing inclinations and tendencies, and what our governing principles and motives of conduct.

Now this knowledge is most interesting and important. Our welfare and usefulness depend upon it. It is necessary to religion: it is one main part of it. Nay, without a competent measure of self-knowledge, we cannot perform aright any of the duties we owe to ourselves, as hath been already observed. Its utility was judged to be so great, even by the heathens themselves, that the precept, *Know thyself*, was said to come down from the gods. And I hardly need tell you, how earnestly the sacred Scriptures recommend it, exhorting us *to take heed to our spirits, to commune with our hearts*, and *to search, try and examine ourselves.*

But it is perhaps of all others, one of the most difficult parts of knowledge; and that on account both of its prodigious extent, and the great variety of obstructions which lie in the way of acquiring it. It comprehends in it innumerable particulars; for it hath respect to all the thoughts, counsels, reasonings, purposes and affections of the heart, which are amazingly subtle, quick, complicated and various in their operation. They who are unacquainted with the construction of the human body, would hardly imagine what intricacies there are in that particu-

lar branch of science, to try the ingenuity of the anatomist. But the mechanism of the soul is far more curious and diversified than that of the body; and of consequence, as the vitiated state of the one is more dangerous and obstinate of cure than the other, so the right understanding the distempers of the heart is attended with peculiar and almost unsurmountable difficulties. It were endless to recite them. We are so indisposed, through various causes, to the study of ourselves; we are prepossessed with such strong prejudices in our own favour; and external objects have so powerful an influence to divert our attention from this important subject; that we may well complain with the psalmist, *Who can understand his errors a?* and with the prophet, *The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked, who can know it b?*

Now as this is the case, the utmost skill, resolution and diligence are necessary, in order, with divine assistance, to our making any progress in the knowledge of ourselves. It behoves us carefully to watch the motions of our hearts, to consider well their complexion, spirit and tendency, to compare them with the dictates of reason, conscience and the word of God, and to pass impartial sentence upon them. We should endeavour frequently to rouse ourselves from that slothful state into which we are apt to degenerate. We should inure ourselves to a habit of reflection and consideration. We should strive to divest ourselves of all predilections or prejudices in our own favour. We should be willing rather to endure those censures which may be the result of a strict examination of the heart, than to enjoy the sweets of a self-complacency, which is the fruit of miserable ignorance and self-deception. We should at certain seasons withdraw from the world in order to converse with ourselves, and make our reading, our social communications, and our attendance on public worship, all in some way or other bend to this point. And, in a word, it should be our prayer, as it was the psalmist's, to the great Father of lights, *Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts. And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting c.*

a Psal. xix. 12. b Jer. xvii. 9. c Psal. cxxxix. 23, 24.

But there is another pre-requisite to the right discharge of the duties we owe to ourselves; and that is,

2. The forming *a just estimate of our interests.*

This indeed is the result of self-knowledge, always accompanies it, and lies, together with that, at the very foundation of the experience and practice of religion. For what religion can there be in the heart of that man, who is a stranger to himself, and has no sense wherein his true honour, importance and happiness consist? Now the soul is our nobler part, and therefore demands our first and principal attention and care. It is the chief seat of pleasure and pain; and of consequence, if it is in an unhealthful state, whatever may be our outward circumstances, we must needs upon the whole be miserable. But what is it that is necessary to the well-being of the soul? It is the orderly subjection of the passions and appetites of nature to the dictates of right reason, and the regular enjoyment of peace of conscience, a sense of God's favour, and a cheerful hope of eternal life. This account of the matter is so plain and obvious, that few will venture to deny it. But alas! there are few only who have such a deep conviction of it, as to produce any considerable effect in their temper and conduct. Here we fail, even those of us who are in the main set right as to this grand leading point: that is to say, though our best interest is our governing end, yet our attention is too frequently diverted from it by the undue influence of external objects. And hence proceed all those defects we so much lament, in regard of the duties we owe to ourselves. Did we steadily keep in view our real happiness, the practice of those duties would daily become more and more easy, cheerful and habitual. The labouring therefore to fix on our hearts this estimate of our true interest, is what I am here recommending, as previously necessary to what is to follow.

To this end, it is of great importance that we avail ourselves of all the observation we make on what happens around us, and of all our experience of the comfort and utility of religion, by applying such observation and experience to the great purpose of confirming our practical judgment in favour of the *chief good*, preferably to every emolument or advantage besides. The enjoyments of the present life are not indeed to be treated with

cynical indifference and contempt: but, since we are apt to overrate them, their allays and imperfections, and their criminal and hurtful tendency too, when immoderately pursued, ought frequently and seriously to be considered.

And here we shall be assisted by innumerable facts which continually occur, and which clearly prove the vanity of the world: such as, the weariness and disgust which accompany sensual gratifications—the pains and disorders of animal nature—the accidental calamities to which we are every moment liable—the rapid progress of time—the change that passes on every thing around us—and the triumphs of death, in various forms, over each individual of the human race. The adverting frequently to these facts, would have a happy effect to lessen our opinion of the value and importance of sublunary things; and so to regulate our conduct towards them. And is not this a piece of justice we owe to ourselves, and which cannot be withheld without a manifest injury to our real interests? Why should we ignominiously suffer ourselves to be imposed upon by appearances? Will the little feeble present pleasure which arises from such wilful imposition, compensate the pain and misery which we may be assured the disappointment will by and by occasion?

In order yet farther to establish our judgment in favour of the *chief good*, we ought to consider also those facts which prove the infinite excellence and importance of spiritual and divine things. And what facts can do this in a more clear, striking and convincing manner, than those held up to our view in the gospel, and those respecting the powers and pleasures of religion, which stand attested by our own experience? Who that beholds the Son of God tabernacling among men, expiring on a cross, rising from the dead, and ascending up into heaven—Who that considers the provision he has hereby made for our pardon, justification and final happiness—Who that realizes the last judgment, the miseries of the damned, and the triumphs of the blessed—I will add, Who that reflects on what has passed in his own mind, when he has learned the value of his soul, and the desirableness of inward peace, hope and joy—but must perceive an infinite importance in the great concerns of religion—an importance which exceeds all human measures, and which

makes the most interesting affairs of the present life appear little, trifling and inconsiderable? Such effect had these great considerations upon the apostle, when he cried out, *God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world a.*

Thus have we taken a general view of these two great points —*The knowledge of ourselves*—And *a right judgment of our interest*; which are the grounds of the duties we owe to ourselves; which duties we now proceed to consider.

Here I might distinctly enlarge on all the affections and appetites of nature, the right government of which is of great importance to our real welfare. But this, I am sensible, is a subject too copious to be particularly discussed at present. I shall therefore confine myself to the duties of *Humility*—*Contentment*—and *Temperance*, which are comprehended in the general idea of *Sobriety*, and which may be very properly described as duties we owe to ourselves, since they chiefly respect matters wherein our interest and happiness, as to the things of the present life, are more immediately concerned. Humility stands opposed to pride, which hath for its object honour; contentment to avarice, which hath for its object wealth; and temperance stands opposed to sensuality, which hath for its object pleasure. To these heads the apostle John refers us, when warning us against voluptuousness, covetuousness and ambition, he speaks of all that is in the world, under the notion of *the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life b.*—Let us begin,

First, With *Humility*.

To be humble is *to think soberly of ourselves*, as the apostle happily expresses it *c*, and to demean ourselves accordingly. Now this temper is distinguishable both from pusillanimity and affectation. Some few there are, who frame too mean and low an idea, both of their natural abilities and their religious attainments. And the effect is, an unreasonable bashfulness and dejection of countenance, and a timid irresolute deportment. But surely it can never be a man's duty to think otherwise of himself than he really is, or of his condition than the fact requires. For this, instead of thinking soberly, would be thinking untruly, and so humility would be founded in falsehood.—There

a Gal. vi. 14. *b* 1 John ii. 16. *c* Rom. xii. 3.

are others also, which is the more common case, who affect to think contemptibly of themselves, whilst in truth they have a very high opinion of their own worth. This is what our Saviour so much condemned in the Pharisees of old: and it is the very worst species of pride, for it involves in it dissimulation and hypocrisy, and is a prostitution of a most amiable virtue to the base purpose of gratifying an insolent vice. But in these instances, the appearance of humility is for the most part so awkwardly assumed, that the vail is easily seen through, and so it defeats its own intention.

But true humility is such a temper, as is the natural result of a fair and impartial judgment of ourselves, our characters and circumstances. He who *thinks soberly*, that is, truly, *of himself*, cannot fail to be a humble man; because, whatever good qualities he may possess, he will see reason to estimate them at a much lower rate than they stand in the opinion of those around him, as he is himself sensible of many corrupt mixtures which others candidly overlook. Pride is founded in ignorance, wilful ignorance. Men take themselves to be what they really are not, and so are vain and self-confident; and the effect appears in their countenances, conversation and deportment. But the reverse is the character of the truly humble man. Knowing himself, he is cautious how he attributes that to himself, which doth not belong to him, how he overrates the good he possesses, and how he undertakes what he is not equal to. Deeply impressed also with a sense of his own numerous follies and sins, he is of a lowly and contrite mind, or, as our Saviour describes him, *poor in spirit a.* Nor can he avoid expressing these tempers in an unaffected modesty of countenance, language and behaviour. *He puts on humbleness of mind b.*—But in order more clearly to understand this amiable grace, and the several duties of it, it will be proper to consider ourselves in a relative view. For it is by comparing ourselves with God and one another, that our humility is brought to the test; and it is in our mutual intercourses, that the fruits of it are chiefly discernible. Now,

a Matt. v. 3.

b Col. iii. 12. ταπεινοφροσυνη, *lowliness of mind*, a virtue which, as some have remarked, was scarce known so much as by name to heathen writers.

1. As to God. When the Christian sets himself in the immediate presence of that infinitely great, wise, holy and perfect Being, how little, ignorant and contemptible does he appear in his own eyes? Awfully struck with the majesty and glory of God, he loses sight of his own importance, and acknowledges that he is *less than nothing and vanity.* Surrounded with the splendours of divine omniscience, his highest attainments in knowledge seem to him but as the dim light of a candle, amidst the refulgent brightness of the sun. And overpowered with a sense of the infinite purity, rectitude, and goodness of God, he is abashed and confounded at his own baseness, vileness and wretchedness. In this temper he approaches God, or however wishes always to approach him, saying with Jacob, *I am not worthy,* O Lord, *of the least of all thy mercies a ;* with Job, *I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes b ;* with Isaiah, *Wo is me, I am a man of unclean lips c ;* and with the publican in the parable, *God be merciful to me a sinner d.*

This temper expresses itself in his reasonings about God, checking that vain curiosity, that presumptuous forwardness, and that bold positivity, with which men are too apt to treat divine truths. In his ready subjection to the commands of God, each of which, convinced of the authority that enjoins them, he reverently acknowledges to be wise, just and good. In his submission to the providences of God, which, however adverse and afflictive, he dares not censure or condemn, but approve and justify. And more especially is it expressed in his cheerful and cordial reception of the gospel, which, as it brings us glad tidings of great joy, so holds up truths to our view extremely mortifying to the natural pride and vanity of the human heart. He thankfully accepts salvation at the hands of divine mercy, as the fruit of the mediation, sacrifice and righteousness of Christ; and he humbly relies on the promised influence of the Holy Spirit, for that instruction, assistance and support, which he finds his present circumstances manifestly require. And then,

a Gen. xxxii. 10. *b* Job xlii. 6.
c Isa. vi. 5. *d* Luke xviii. 13.

2. As to our fellow-creatures. A comparison of ourselves with others, will prove a farther occasion of trying our humility, and, if we are really possessed of it, will draw forth many genuine expressions of this excellent temper. The apostle exhorts us, *in lowliness of mind, to esteem others better than ourselves a.* Not that we are, in all cases, indiscriminately to give the preference to others, for that would be acting contrary to the truth, which surely can never be a man's duty. But the meaning is, that we should rather be partial to the good qualities of others than to our own, and that in our deportment we should err rather on the side of modesty than forwardness.

In regard of *natural endowments*, whether of body or mind, such as beauty, understanding and the like; a humble man will remember to whom he is indebted for these advantages, that it is *God* who *hath made him to differ* from others, and that what he hath he has received. Sensible of his propensity to self-complacency, he will not only be cautious how he adverts too frequently to these endowments, unless it be with a view to check immoderate bashfulness, or to excite thankfulness to God; but he will be disposed to contemplate the same accomplishments in others, in order to restrain and suppress his own natural vanity. So far will he be from feeling envy and ill-will excited by such comparison, the usual effects of which are calumny and detraction, that he will admire their virtues, and with pleasure commend them; and, at the same time, conscious of his own blemishes and imperfections, he will carry it modestly, candidly, and affably towards all men.

In like manner, as to our *civil connections*, or the station of life we fill. True humility will teach a man not to value himself on account of the riches or honours he possesses, and so treat those in inferior circumstances, with supercilious haughtiness and contempt; for he will remember, that these distinctions are of trifling account in themselves, of no importance when put in the balance with real goodness, and that they will all cease at death. Reflecting, therefore, that *God hath made of one blood all nations of men that dwell on the face of the earth b;* he will be ready courteously to perform every office of kindness to the meanest of his fellow-creatures, and *to conde-*

a Phil. ii. 3. b Acts xvii. 26.

acend to men of low estate a. And, on the other hand, this temper will incline those, whom Providence hath placed in lower stations, to demean themselves with all becoming modesty and decency, laying a restraint on the first risings of restless ambition, and disposing them cheerfully to give honour to whom honour is due.

To which it must be added, that in regard of his *religious attainments*, the Christian will give striking proofs of his humility in his behaviour towards both good and bad men. As to the latter, we shall not see him with an air of self-complacency exulting over them, like the proud Pharisee, who when he said, *God I thank thee that I am not as this publican b*, meant rather to offer incense to his own vanity, than sincere praise to God. But we shall hear him expressing a tender compassion for his fellow-sinners, amidst all their guilt and misery; while, with a deep sense of his own unworthiness, and unfeigned gratitude to Heaven, he cheerfully admits that it is *by the grace of God he is what he is c.* Nor will he countenance in his breast a mean or disrespectful idea of any of his fellow-Christians, however inferior to him in spiritual gifts, or other nobler attainments. So far from it, that, like the apostle, he will be ready to acknowledge, on all proper occasions, that he is *less than the least of all saints d.* An acknowledgment this which, however at first view it may scarce seem reconcileable with sincerity, yet falls very naturally from his lips, who is deeply versed in the knowledge of himself, and totally unpractised in the malevolent art of judging others.—Such are the outlines of that humble temper, which distinguishes the character of the real Christian from that of other men, and is the first and chiefest expression of true and genuine religion.

And now it were easy to shew you our obligations to this amiable temper and conduct. The humble Christian is a character which fails not to strike every beholder with reverence and pleasure. Yet, alas! how few are there who answer to that description! Men are naturally vain, proud and self-sufficient. Divine grace therefore it is that subdues their haughty spirits, lays them at the feet of mercy, and moulds them into a meek,

a Rom. xii. 16. *b* Luke xviii. 11.
c 1 Cor. xv. 10. *d* Eph. iii. 8.

lowly, contrite disposition: and this it does by leading them into an acquaintance with God and their own hearts. Here I might shew you how admirably the gospel is adapted to excite, cherish and promote this temper; so that he who is a stranger to it, hath never entered into the spirit of the gospel, or felt its power on his heart.—I might shew you what peculiar marks of honour the Scriptures put upon the humble man—the peace and pleasure which accompany the exercise of this grace, and its usefulness to society—the striking examples of humility set before us in the Bible, and especially that of our Lord Jesus, *who being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God; but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself; and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross* a.—And, in a word, I might tell you of the many great blessings promised to the humble Christian, not in this life only, but in that to come, *Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven* b. But I forbear—From humility let us go on,

SECONDLY, To *Contentment*, which is the offspring of humility, and another branch of duty we owe to ourselves.

By contentment, I mean a cheerful acquiescence in the will of Providence, respecting our outward or worldly circumstances. *Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have* c. And the apostle tells us, as to himself, that *he had learned in whatsoever state he was, therewith to be content* d. Now this temper is very distinguishable from that insensibility, or, to say the best of it, that easiness of disposition, which is the mere effect of natural constitution. One man may be so framed, as to be less susceptible of impressions from external objects than another; and of consequence may seem to be of a contented mind, while he is a stranger to those reasonings, which enter into the spirit of this divine grace. The behaviour, however, of such a person will be different from that of the real Christian, and the difference may, I think, be pretty easily discerned by a sensible observer.—It is also far-

a Phil. ii. 6—8.
b Matt. v. 3.
c Heb. xiii. 5.
d Phil. iv. 11.

ther to be premised, that contentment does by no means forbid the proper use of all lawful measures to improve our condition in life. For if this were the case, it would cut the sinews of industry, and extinguish some of the most useful principles to society which Providence hath implanted in the human breast. A man's diligence, therefore, in the management of his secular concerns, is no argument of his being defective in the duty I am recommending.

But, true Christian contentment stands opposed to *avarice*. Now, as the chief expressions of an avaricious temper, are disquietude and anxiety, an eager and restless pursuit of the world, envy and ill-will, and a secret murmuring at the ways of Providence; so the opposite qualities are the proper characteristics of a contented mind. To dwell on each of these particulars would carry me too far; it shall suffice, therefore, in a few words, to contrast the two characters.

The discontented man is ever restless and uneasy, dissatisfied with his station in life, his connections, and almost every circumstance that happens to him. He is continually peevish and fretful, impatient of every injury he receives, and unduly depressed with every disappointment he suffers. He considers most other persons as happier than himself, and enjoys hardly any of the blessings of Providence with a calm and grateful mind. He is *careful and troubled about many things a*, anxious for to-morrow, *what he shall eat, what he shall drink, and wherewithal he shall be clothed b*. He forms to himself a thousand distressing fears concerning futurity, and makes his present condition unhappy, by anticipating the miseries he may possibly endure years to come. His eager and passionate fondness for the world hurries him into the most dangerous pursuits, and sometimes tempts him beyonds the limits of truth and honesty. *He seeks great things for himself c*, and resolving, at all events, *to be rich, he falls into temptation, and a snare, and into foolish and hurtful lusts, which pierce* him *through with many sorrows, and*, in the end, *drown* him *in destruction and perdition d*. While he forgets the miseries of those beneath him, he is envious of the honour and happiness of those above him. And, in a word, he

a Luke x. 41. *b* Matt. vi. 31.
c Jer. xlv. 5. *d* 1 Tim. vi. 9, 10.

is ever petulantly murmuring at the divine proceedings, and ever arrogantly arraigning the wisdom, equity and goodness of Providence, at his own partial tribunal.—Such is the character of the discontented man.

On the contrary, the contented Christian is calm and composed, well satisfied with the lot assigned him, or at least disposed, be the inconveniences attending it what they may, to make the best of his condition. With Agur he prays, *Give me neither poverty nor riches*, but *feed me with food convenient for me a.* And when offers of worldly greatness are made him, that seem unnatural, and may prove dangerous to his best interests, he replies with the Shunamite, *I dwell among mine own people b.* Having learned that the happiness of life consists not in the abundance a man hath, that all terrene enjoyments are uncertain and transitory, and that nothing short of the favour of God can give the mind true content; he does not eagerly pursue the profits and emoluments of the world, much less is he capable of purchasing them at the expence of honour and conscience. He remembers that *the little a righteous man hath, is better than all the treasures of the wicked c;* and that *a good man shall be satisfied from himself d.* While he prudently provides for futurity, he is not anxious about the event; but leaving the issue with Providence, he persuades himself that all will be well. He indulges not an envious disposition; but rather rejoices in the prosperity of others; and instead of making himself unhappy, by unduly resenting injuries done him, he patiently endures them, and meekly forgives them. He eyes the hand of God in his afflictions, and so dares not quarrel with that great Being, but quietly submits, saying with Eli, *It is the Lord, let him do what seemeth him good e.* Nay, the weight of his troubles he lessens, by reflecting how much greater it might, and most certainly would have been, had God dealt with him according to his deserts. In short, he opposes his mercies to his afflictions, his joys to his sorrows, and his condition, how ever mean, to that of those who are in more distressing circumstances than himself; and so, upon the whole, with a cheerful

a Prov. xxx. 8. b 2 Kings iv. 13. c Psal. xxxvii. 16.
d Prov. xiv. 14. e 1 Sam. iii. 18.

spirit, he acknowledges that he is highly indebted to the favour and goodness of heaven—

"What a vain thing, says he, is the world with all its enjoyments! It will be of little importance to me a few months or years hence, whether I was rich or poor, applauded or despised. My great object is to pass through life quietly and usefully. Let others contend for crowns and kingdoms, for treasures and possessions: they are but trifles, yea the whole world is nothing to me, in comparison with my immortal soul. I rest satisfied with the allotments of Providence. What God does is right and well. I choose that things should be as he would have them; for he knows better what is fit for me, than I know myself. A thousand mercies have fallen to my share, which others have been denied. For these I am thankful. What I covet above all things is the favour of God, a sense of it impressed upon my heart, and a perfect conformity of temper to the divine will. May I but be allowed to converse with the King of kings, I can be content to be a peasant. Nay, I can patiently endure the frowns of the whole world, if I may enjoy the smiles of a reconciled God." Such are the reasonings of the contented mind.

Now the duties of contentment, as well as those of humility, are *fruits of holiness*, the genuine product of true religion. The grace of God subdues our rebellious hearts; and so the various arguments which the light of nature and the gospel of Christ suggest, to persuade us to a cheerful acquiescence in the divine will, being duly attended to, have their proper and natural effect. These arguments are too numerous to be particularly considered here, or I might remind you of the doctrine of providence, the relations that subsist among mankind, that subordination which is necessary to the well-being of society, the unavoidable imperfections of the present state, the comforts as well as miseries which attend every condition of life, the shortness and uncertainty of our continuance here, and the painfulness and unavailableness of discontent. And to these considerations, I might add, the more clear and glorious discoveries of Divine revelation, the character therein given us of the blessed God, the uncontrouled authority which the Lord Jesus Christ is represented as exercising over the kingdom of providence, his special concern for the welfare of his faithful people, the many

promises respecting our temporal interests, the striking examples of contentment held up to our view, the rich comforts of religion, and in a word, the bright prospects of a future and eternal world. Who that believes these great truths, enters into the spirit of them, and frequently contemplates them, but must from thence *learn*, with the apostle, *in whatever state he is, therewith to be content?* Say, Christian, have you not felt their influence to soothe your ruffled passions, and to diffuse tranquillity and cheerfulness through your soul? Such then is the effect of true religion.—And he who is thus instructed in the duties of contentment, will also find himself disposed,

THIRDLY, To those of *Temperance.*

By temperance, is meant the due regulation of our bodily appetites, or a moderate use of those enjoyments which are peculiar to animal nature. As to gross acts of sensuality, or direct violations of the laws of chastity and sobriety, they are so generally acknowledged to be criminal (though alas! too frequently practised), that I need not dwell upon them. Few will dare to be open advocates for such indulgences, since it is agreed on all hands, that they are the sources of innumerable mischiefs to the persons, substance and reputation of individuals, and to the peace, safety and good order of society. There can be no doubt therefore, that it will be the concern of every real Christian, to maintain a virtuous character in the view of all around him: and *their* pretensions to religion, be they who they may, are most certainly vain, who can dare allow themselves to break through the fences, which the laws of God and men have established against vice and immorality. No! *The grace of God that bringeth salvation, teaches us that, denying the lusts* of the flesh, *we should live soberly in this present world a.*

But what I have chiefly in view, is to explain those duties of temperance whereby we may not only be held back from the criminal excesses just mentioned, but from all such approaches to them as are offensive to God and hurtful to our real interests. And here it should be observed in general, that the moderate gratification of our appetites is by no means sinful. For if it were, to what end were they given us? It can be no harm to eat when we are hungry, or to drink when we are thirsty. The

a Tit. ii. 12.

evil lies in excess. And since we are prone, through the pleasure which results from the gratification of our appetites, to allow them too great a scope; it is our duty to consider the proper ends for which they were implanted in our nature, to set such bounds to them as reason directs, and in some instances, absolutely to deny them, even though the indulgence of them may not be strictly criminal. Such a treatment of ourselves, under certain circumstances, may be very expedient, in order to hold the body in subjection to the soul, and to secure our nobler part from a slavery which is as base and dishonourable, as it is injurious and sinful.

As to what respects *Chastity*. We are not only to abstain from unlawful connections, and, as the apostle expresses it, *to possess each one his vessel in sanctification and honour a*; but carefully to avoid all those indecent liberties of conversation, reading and deportment, which have a manifest tendency to inflame the passions, and which are too well known to need be mentioned. We are to suppress impure thoughts at their first rising, to keep a guard upon our imagination and senses, *to make a covenant with our eyes b*; to lay aside all *filthiness, foolish talking and jesting, which are not convenient c*, and to pray earnestly to God *to create in us clean hearts d*.

And then as to that branch of temperance which respects our *food*. We are not only to abstain from those abominable excesses of *surfeiting and drunkenness e*, which totally deprive men of their reason, and degrade them to the rank of brutes; but from all immoderate use of meats and drinks. And here, the rules to direct our conduct, are so plain and easy, that they can scarce be mistaken. That doubtless, may be deemed an abuse of the blessings of Providence, which hath an effect, in any degree, to injure our *health*, to cloud our understandings, or to unfit us for the duties of life. When we thus transgress the bounds of moderation, our *table becomes a snare* to us; and for the sake of a little present gratification, we entail disorders on our constitution, defraud the poor of their right, and put it out of our power to render those services to God and man which our station demands. But regard is to be had to our *circum-*

a 1 Thess. iv. 3, 4. *b* Job xxxi. 1. *c* Eph. v. 4.
d Psal. li. 10. *e* Luke xxi. 34.

stances, as well as to the health of our bodies and minds. Extravagance is not to be justified in any: there is however a kind of plenty and elegance which well becomes the tables of those of superior rank, and which either to imitate or condemn, argues equal vanity in those beneath them. But it requires no pains to prove that that is intemperance, be the motive of it what it may, whether pride or luxury, which hurries persons into expences they cannot answer; or ties up their hands from those acts of liberality, to which their fellow-creatures have an unquestionable title. Nor should I forget to observe, that sobriety sets limits also to the *time* we spend in avocations of this nature. For though we are not guilty of excess in either of the instances just mentioned, yet if we idly squander away hours in the gratifications of animal nature, the duties both of civil and religious life must be neglected, or at least considerably hindered and curtailed.—And now these rules, as to the use of meats and drinks, may for the most part be applied to all our other sensual or worldly enjoyments.

The duties of temperance thus briefly explained, approve themselves, I make no doubt, to every man's reason and conscience. Yet, so violent are the appetites of depraved nature, that multitudes are not to be deterred, even by the laws of their country, from the open indulgence of them. And as to those whose general deportment is decent and sober, there are but few, it is to be feared, whose conduct is influenced by any higher motive than that of a regard to their health, reputation or worldly interests. It is the grace of God therefore, and that only, which effectually emancipates the immortal mind from the cruel thraldom of bodily appetites. And this it does, by setting the Divine Being in all his infinite perfections before our eyes, by convincing us of the superior value and excellence of the soul to the body, by giving us a taste of the refined pleasures of communion with Heaven, and by fixing upon our hearts a lively impression of the important realities of a future state. And as Divine grace thus puts the government of our appetites, as well as our other passions, into the hands of enlightened reason; so the gospel supplies arguments peculiar to itself, to persuade us to these duties of chastity and sobriety. As particularly, God's own Son having been *made flesh, and dwelt among*

us a; his having *bought us with the price* of his own blood; *joined us to himself*, and made *our bodies his members b*; as also the inhabitation of the Spirit, for *our bodies are the temples of the Holy Ghost c*; and the resurrection of the body at the last day. *They* therefore *who are Christ's* must *crucify the flesh, with the affections and lusts d*. And *if any man hath not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his e*.

Thus have we considered the several duties we owe to God —to one another—and to ourselves, which are all comprehended in the general phrase in our text, of *the fruits of holiness*.

And now it remains that I close the whole with two or three reflections, which, however important, the length of this discourse will but just allow me to mention.—We hence see the infinite excellence and utility of true religion. For if the duties that have been described are of such consequence to the comfort and usefulness of individuals, and to the general welfare and happiness of society; *that* surely is most worthy of our attention and regard, which sets these duties in their true light, and furnishes us with the noblest motives to urge us to them, and the only effectual aids to enable us to perform them in a right manner.—By this extensive view we have taken of *the fruits of holiness*, we are also naturally led into an examination of ourselves, whether we are Christians indeed, what is the general tenor of our conduct, and by what motives we are influenced. *By their fruits*, says our Saviour, *ye shall know them f*.—And since those who, as the apostle expresses it in this context, *have from their heart obeyed that form of doctrine which was delivered unto them*, are nevertheless deeply sensible of innumerable follies and sins; how shall we sufficiently admire and adore that grace, which has made so free and ample a provision for our final acceptance and salvation in Jesus Christ! Thus hath the blessed God, of his infinite mercy, effectually relieved us of those distressing fears which would have miserably perplexed and impeded us in the path of duty; and at the same time, as effectually secured to himself alone the glory of our everlasting salvation. But of these things we shall have occasion to discourse hereafter.

a John i. 14. *b* 1 Cor. vi. 30. xvii. 15. *c* Ver. 19.
d Gal. v. 24. *e* Rom. viii. 9. *f* Matt. vii. 20.

DISCOURSE IX.

THE DIVINE ORIGIN OF RELIGION.

JAMES III. 17.——*The wisdom that is from above.*——

WHATEVER treatment serious religion may meet with from the generality of mankind, it certainly is the noblest guest that ever visited our world. A thousand gifts it pours into every breast that receives it,—gifts which directly tend to enrich and adorn the mind, and to cheer and gladden the heart. What they are we have in a former discourse seen. Let us now enquire whence this most kind and benevolent stranger comes; or, in other words, trace religion back to its divine origin, shew its heavenly extraction, and how it is first generated in the soul of man. An argument this, which, while it still farther evinces the excellence and importance of it, will teach us our infinite obligations to the grace of God for it. *This wisdom*, says our text, *is from above.*

That the apostle is here speaking of the religion of the heart, and of the genuine fruits of it in the life, will clearly appear from the context, and indeed from the general scope of the epistle. Many there were, even in those early ages of the church, who, amidst all their pretended zeal for the doctrine of Christ, indulged a temper and conduct directly opposite to the true spirit and genius of the gospel. In this letter, therefore, directed to the dispersed Jews, he sets himself with great earnestness to reprove the folly and presumption of these men; shewing that *faith without works is dead, being alone*, and that it cannot truly exist in the mind, if its influence be not felt in the heart, nor its effects seen in the life. And since they talked much of their superior wisdom and knowledge, to the utter neglect of vital and practical religion, he urges on them, wise as they would seem to be, their obligations to love and obedience. 'Who is a wise man, and endued with knowledge amongst you? Let him shew, out of a good conversation, his works with meekness of

wisdom *a*.' Whence he takes occasion, with great justness of sentiment, and force of expression, to describe the different characters of that wisdom which is *from beneath*, and of that which is *from above*. As to the former, the wisdom of which these vain and formal professors boasted, he tells them, it is *earthly, sensual and devilish*, it derives from the world, the flesh and the devil, and its maxims being agreeable to corrupt nature, have a very general and powerful influence. *But the wisdom that is from above, is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy.*

By wisdom then the apostle most certainly intends, in this place, the religion of the heart. So it is very frequently described in sacred Scripture, especially the Old Testament. *The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom b. The ways of wisdom are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace c.* And it is the highest expression of wisdom in the whole world, however it may be contemned by the proud, and rejected by the vain and sensual part of mankind. If to have just apprehensions of God, his nature and perfections, of ourselves and the state we are in, of Christ and the way of salvation by him, of our duty and the manner in which it should be performed, of our privileges, and the hope that is set before us: if this be a kind of knowledge of the last importance to our present and future interests, then is true religion, in which all this is included, justly styled wisdom. And hence our Lord Jesus Christ, whose doctrine comprehends in it all these discoveries, is called the *wisdom of God d*. And the apostle Paul, discoursing of the excellence and sublimity of the gospel, thus describes it: *We speak wisdom among them that are perfect: yet not the wisdom of this world, nor of the princes of this world, that come to nought. But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory. Which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory e.* I shall not stay here to point out to you the wisdom that is displayed in the doctrine of the Bible, which is the

a James iii. 13. b Psal. cxi. 10. c Prov. iii. 17.
d 1 Cor. i. 24. e 1 Cor. ii. 6—8.

great object of religion, nor the wisdom that is expressed in an entire subjection of heart to its sacred dictates, which is the sum of religion; but shall immediately proceed to the main object of this discourse, and that is to shew you, *that this wisdom is from above.* And here I shall,

I. Inquire in what sense the wisdom of which the text speaks is *from above*, which will give me an opportunity to illustrate this point, of its divine origin in the heart of man; and then,

II. Endeavour, by some plain arguments, to prove and confirm this important truth.

I. In what sense is this wisdom *from above?* And,

1. If you consider it in reference to those divine truths which are the main objects of it, it is *from above.* The discoveries of the Bible are necessary to produce that temper of mind towards God, which we have lately been describing, and these discoveries are of divine original. It is by a revelation from Heaven we are assured of forgiveness and eternal life, and instructed in the way by which we become entitled to both these great blessings. And the gospel, considering its peculiarity and glory, loudly speaks for itself, that it is not of human, but divine contrivance. What man could have ever thought of the Son of God's becoming incarnate; and of sinners being justified and saved by his obedience and death? The scheme must have been framed originally in the eternal mind. It is from above, from whence the Saviour himself came, and whither he is now returned. 'Without controversy, great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, and received up into glory *a.*' The great variety also of external evidence, both prophetical and miraculous, by which the Bible is supported, sufficiently proves its divinity. So with the apostle Peter we may say, 'We have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ *b.*' Religion, therefore, objectively considered, is from above.

2. It is, in regard of its tendency and effects, spiritual and divine; and in this sense also *from above.* It claims the superior faculties of the soul for the proper seat of its residence, and

a 1 Tim. iii. 16. *b* 2 Pet. i. 16.

sways its sceptre over the heart and conscience. It transforms the minds of men into the image of God, and makes them *partakers of the divine nature a.* Its effects are not earthly, sensual and diabolical; but pure, spiritual and celestial. It refines the understanding, enlarges the soul, elevates the heart to God, and prepares it for the business and pleasures of a better world. It dignifies a man far above any other attainment, and puts him in possession of a happiness far more substantial than any other enjoyment can afford. It brings heaven in a degree down into the soul, and in a sense exalts the soul to heaven. In short, it is the first fruits of everlasting life, the beginning of future glory, and the early dawn of that one long and bright day, which shall gladden the fields of paradise to all eternity. But what I have chiefly in view is,

3. That it hath its origin *from above.* This it is true is affirmed of all the common blessings of life. But religion being a gift in its own nature the most excellent and valuable, and by reason of the depravity of mankind, the farthest from their inclination and pursuit; it may with peculiar propriety be said to come down from above. It is the offspring of divine energy, the fruit of the ever blessed Spirit. To ascertain indeed with any precision the manner in which his almighty influence is exerted on the hearts of men, is perhaps an attempt beyond the reach of our feeble capacities. Nor is it to be wondered at, any more than that we cannot comprehend the manner in which the soul operates on the body. But why should the difficulty of clearly explaining it, be admitted as a more solid objection against the fact in the one instance, than in the other? It is, as we shall presently see, the doctrine of the Bible, which, while it allows the divine operations to be very inexplicable to our finite understandings, assures us that every good man *is born of God b.*

But what I have in the first place to do, is to give a plain and familiar account of the process of this good work on the heart, wherein we shall, I persuade myself, evidently perceive the traces of divine power and goodness. In the mean time there are two or three things to be premised, which will tend to clear the grand point I have in view. And the first is this,

a 2 Pet. i. 4. *b* 1 John v. 1.

1. That religion itself is the *most reasonable* thing in the whole world: and that the efficacy of divine grace in communicating it to the heart, doth by no means contradict the original principles of human nature. Their account of it is both unjust and unscriptural, who affect to place it in direct opposition to reason; and think they never do it so much honour, as when they set it at variance with nature. Indeed the reason of man in his present state is corrupted, and his nature depraved: and therefore the false principles which in consequence of this have taken place in the mind and heart, must be opposed and overcome. But does it thence follow that religion is an unreasonable thing, or that God deals with men otherwise than as reasonable creatures? He who knows what the fear of God is, sees the highest reason in it. And the divine influences, however powerful and effectual we believe them to be, are nevertheless adapted to our original frame, as composed of an understanding, will and affections. It is not by a blind impulse that men are determined to that which is good; but by the full conviction of their enlightened judgment, and the hearty consent of their renewed will. So that suppose the sinner as ignorant and rebellious against God as you will, yet when a change is wrought on his heart, he is dealt with in a manner perfectly consistent with his character and denomination as a man. The communication of divine light to the mind, and the persuasion of the will, are indeed the work of God. But why should it be thought strange that he should instruct and persuade, any more than that men should be allowed to instruct and persuade one another? It is farther to be observed,

2. As this wisdom is from above, so we become possessed of it *in the use of means* appointed to that end. Some few exceptions there may be to this general rule. But for the most part it is by reading or hearing the word, or by the seasonable intervention of some providence, that the conscience is awakened, and the mind engaged to the contemplation of future and eternal things. As in nature, so in grace, God usually works by means. Hence he has instituted the preaching of the gospel, and has commanded his servants to *compel men to come in a*, to *call them every where to repent b*, to *persuade them*, and *in Christ's stead*

a Luke xiv. 23. *b* Acts xvii. 30.

to beseech them to be reconciled unto God by him a. And it is easy to see how he who holds the reins of providence in his hand, can so over-rule the particular incidents of a man's life, as to render them subservient to his best interests. The instructions of pious parents, the disappointments of life, the terrors of a sick-bed, a sermon, yea, a seasonable word dropt in private conversation, may doubtless, with the blessing of God, prove the instruments of conveying infinite good to the immortal mind. Nay, so plain are the directions which Scripture gives even to unregenerate men with respect to reading, meditation, prayer and an attendance on public worship, that in an ordinary way there is little room to expect they will become possessed of the great blessings of religion, while they live in the total neglect of them. To which I would add,

3. That religion is a *gradual attainment*, or in other words, that the knowledge, experience and practice of it will admit of continual improvement. It must be acknowledged indeed, that no one can be a good and bad man at one and the same time. Yet this does not hinder, but there may be many serious thoughts, many deep convictions, and many hard struggles of the mind, previous to a sinner's conversion to God; and that being converted, his knowledge may be very imperfect, his faith very weak, and his hopes and joys subject to much fluctuation and change. And such a view of the beginning and progress of religion in the heart, is sufficiently countenanced by the word of God; where it is compared to a birth, to the sowing of seed in the ground, and to the instruction and discipline of a school. So we read of 'being born again *b*,' of 'Christ being formed in us *c*,' of 'the bruised reed and the smoking flax *d*,' of 'being weak in the faith *e*,' and of 'desiring like new born babes the sincere milk of the word, that we may grow thereby *f*.' All which expressions may serve to check the presumption of those, who will hardly allow that there is any real religion in that heart, which possesses not an assurance of faith and those ecstatic visionary kinds of joys, which they pretend themselves to have felt. No. Of Abijah it is said, 'there was some good

a 2 Cor. v. 11, 20. *b* John iii. 3. *c* Gal. iv. 19.
d Matt. xii. 20. *e* Rom. xiv. 1. *f* 1 Pet. ii. 2.

thing found in him towards the God of Israel *a*. And the apostle, speaking of this very matter with respect to the Philippians, describes it as 'a good work which God had begun in them,' and which remained yet to *be performed* or finished *b*.

These things premised, I proceed now to describe *the rise and progress of religion* in the heart of a sinner. And that the divine influence may the more remarkably appear therein, we will suppose him to have spent the earlier part of life in a course of gaiety and vice, to the utter neglect of all concern about his soul and a future state. Whatever advantages of education or instruction he might enjoy above others, they were slighted and abused; and whatever checks or remonstrances of conscience he might sometimes feel, they were opposed and stifled. But now, by some affliction, by some sermon, by some seasonable admonition, or by some other means directed by Providence, and accompanied with a divine influence, he is roused from his deep sleep of sin, and alarmed with a tremendous apprehension of approaching danger. Death, judgment and eternity are perhaps the objects that first strike him. To these his attention is fixed with earnest solicitude, whilst his past sins, beheld with a confused kind of dread, threaten the speedy execution of divine wrath.

And what shall he in these circumstances do?—The uneasiness he feels puts him, it may be, upon seeking relief from worldly amusements and pleasures. To them he flies—But all in vain. Those false remedies rather exasperate than palliate the disease. His fears quickly return, heightened and aggravated by a clearer view and more pungent sense of the guilt he has contracted.—Still eager to obtain quiet to his restless mind, and forced from this vain retreat of sensual gratification, he perhaps resolves on reformation, and thinks to add to it the merit of some extraordinary acts of austerity and devotion. What he thus resolves he attempts—but alas! he fails in the attempt. He is unequal to the painful labours which slavish fear would impose; and sad disappointment convinces him how deceitful all his vows were, and how fruitless all his best endeavours were to expiate past guilt.

a 1 Kings xiv. 13. *b* Phil. i. 6.

Sin now appears more *exceeding sinful*, and his heart far more depraved and treacherous than he ever yet apprehended it. And thus wretched and helpless, he cries out—"What must I do? Whither shall I flee?—Am I undone—utterly undone?—Is there no balm in Gilead—no Physician there?—Yes, says Mercy, there is;" whilst with one hand she gently holds him up from despair, and with the other, points to the bleeding sacrifice of Jesus the Son of God.——"Well, replies he, encouraged by this beam of hope darted on his heart, *Who knows but he may turn away from his fierce anger, that I perish not?—I will arise, and go to my Father, and will say to him—Father, I have sinned, and am no more worthy to be called thy son.* My guilt is great and complicated, and shouldst thou frown me from thy presence, the sentence would be just.—But still suffer—O suffer a helpless sinner to pour out his dying groans at thy feet.—Thou art my Judge, O put strength into me.—Permit me to plead mercy while I lie at the foot of mercy—at the foot of a throne that mercy has built, and thy Son has sprinkled with his own blood. Will not *he* become an intercessor for sinners who died for them?—Nay, will not thy perfections themselves, for his sake, become their advocates? Shall omnipotence crush a worm? Shall justice drag a sinner from the altar on which the Lamb of God has bled and died? Will not thy name, thy great name, be exalted by saving the most unworthy?—*Lord, I believe, help thou my unbelief.*—On thy word—thy promise—thy grace I lay fast hold.—Into the hands of Christ I commit my guilty soul.—To the infinite merit of his obedience and death alone I refer myself.—And wilt thou reject me?—O no! Thine arm I see extended to save me—compassion is in thine eyes, and pardon in thine hands.—I rejoice—O the riches of the mercy and love of God! How vile has been my ingratitude, to sin against such a God!—Were my head waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears, I would weep day and night for mine iniquities!—Henceforth, sin, I wage an eternal war with thee. Henceforth, Lord, I yield, my heart, my life, my all, to thy government and service."

Thus we see how religion rises into existence in the heart of one hitherto dead in trespasses and sins. And this imperfect description of it will, I persuade myself, be found to agree with

the account our Saviour gives of it in some of his parables, compared with examples recorded both in the Old and New Testament. And though the circumstances of particular cases may differ, yet from this instance we may collect some general idea of the reasoning of every truly serious and humble penitent. Nor can we, I think, fail of seeing the hand of God in all this. As the heart is naturally inclined to the love of the world, and indisposed to the things of God, so it is thus, by some circumstance, under the immediate direction of Heaven, that the attention is first fixed to the great concerns of religion. The mind is perhaps gradually enlightened, and the passions variously exercised. But the issue, whatever struggles may be felt within, is an entire acquiescence in that method of salvation which God has appointed, and a cordial approbation of the ways of wisdom, as most fit and reasonable.

Nor is it for us to say, how mild or how severe the means may be, whereby God is pleased to bring men into a saving acquaintance with himself—for how long or how short a time the mind may be overspread with darkness, doubt and fear—and how clearly distinguishable, or how almost imperceptible the transition may be from a perfect indifference about religion, to a confirmed approbation and love of it. But the influence of the Holy Spirit herein is surely to be observed and acknowledged. It is this that fastens the word upon the conscience, this that softens the heart, this that bends and subdues the will, and this that renews and sanctifies the affections.

PART II.

We proceed now to the principal object of this discourse, which is,

II. By some plain arguments to prove and confirm this important truth, *That religion is from above*, or that it is the fruit of the influence and operation of the blessed Spirit. That this is the case seems,

First, Highly probable from a consideration that *men have it not naturally.*

By religion, I mean in general the love of God, or a prevailing disposition of the heart to please, obey and serve him. And by men's not having it naturally, I mean that human na-

ture in its present depraved state is wholly indisposed to it, or in other words, that persons, as soon as they become capable of reason and action, instead of delighting in God, preferring his favour above all things, and cordially aiming to approve themselves to him, discover a dislike of his pure and righteous commands, and an obstinate prejudice and enmity against them. Whence the consequence is, that if their hearts are renewed and changed, it must be by a power superior to that of nature. Now there is no possible way of evading the force of this argument, but by denying, either that this is a true account of religion, or that men are thus naturally indisposed to it, or that the conclusion hence drawn is fair and just, I mean the necessity of an extraordinary and superior influence in order to the conversion of a sinner.—But will any one,

1. In the first place, deny that religion is what we have just now described it, or venture to affirm that it consists merely in external acts of sobriety, justice and worship, without any regard to the inward principles, aims and affections of the heart? If he will, he is surely chargeable with offering violence as well to the plain dictates of reason, as to the express declarations of the Bible. The great object of religion is the blessed God. If therefore our hearts are not subjected to his authority, and we are not influenced by an affectionate sense of his love and goodness, our outward actions, however virtuous and good in themselves, can with no propriety be denominated religious. And yet, strange as it may seem, we do find men sadly prone thus to disguise, mutilate and deprave the natural and proper idea of genuine religion. And having so done, it is not to be wondered at that they know how to compliment a much larger part of mankind with this venerable character, than have a real title to it. But reason itself, if duly attended to, would teach men, that the most splendid external appearances, yea actions the most substantially beneficial to society, are no farther expressive of a worthy character, than as they proceed from the temper of the heart. Let us then,

2. Inquire, Whether religion thus defined is connatural to us? Whether we bring it into the world with us? Or in other words, whether, when reason tells us what it is, there are strong propensities in our breasts to it? Are we prone, as soon as we

become capable of knowing that there is a God, and of being taught our duty to him, cheerfully to cultivate such knowledge, and cordially to fall in with such instructions? Is there the same inclination and tractableness in the minds of children to these matters, as to the gratification of the appetites and affections of animal nature?—Surely every one's reflection and experience will testify the contrary. Nay, I may venture to add, that men must acknowledge, if they have not strangely forgot themselves, that in the early part of life, as well as afterwards, their hearts were averse to serious and spiritual religion, and that no yoke was more uneasy and galling to their necks, than the restraints of education and conscience. *They did not like to retain God in their thoughts a*, and *their carnal minds were enmity against him b*. These are facts too notorious to be absolutely denied. Yet I am sensible, wit and ingenuity, unhappily prostituted to the service of depraved nature, have too often found means so to palliate and disguise these matters, as to take off from the minds of men, the force of the argument hence drawn in favour of the necessity of divine influences.

But after all that hath been said of the flexibility of young minds, and of their being easily susceptible of religious impressions; of the fear of sin, yea the evident marks of piety, which some in their early days have discovered; and of the pains which many others have been obliged to take with themselves to get rid of conscience, that they may the more quietly enjoy the pleasures of a sinful course of life: yet these things do by no means disprove the grand point. They prove indeed, that there are degrees of depravity, that the light of reason and conscience is not wholly extinguished in our nature, and that education is of excellent use to direct and improve it. But no inference can thence be drawn, that the mind of man is naturally free from an evil bias, much less that its propensities are to virtue and religion. For if it were so, whence is it that there is in fact so little religion, yea, so little morality in the world, as the history of every age and country sufficiently declares? And allowing evil example (of the very existence of which upon this scheme no satisfactory account is given), I say, allowing it to have all the energy in it that can be imagined; is it reasonable

a Rom. i. 28. b Rom. viii. 7.

to suppose men would be so universally subdued thereby, if their minds whilst young, were in a neutral state, and especially if the balance of their inclinations preponderated on the side of religion? It were rather in this case to be wondered at, that any one should yield to temptation; but absolutely unaccountable that so few should have resolution enough to withstand it. It is plain therefore that men are not prone to religion, or in other words, that they have it not naturally.

Is it not then highly probable, to say the least, that they who do possess it, must receive it from above, that is, by virtue of a divine energy, or an influence superior to the utmost force of nature? But that this conclusion may be more than probable, let us consider,

SECONDLY, That all *human means* for bringing men experimentally acquainted with real religion, are of themselves *ineffectual.*

A proposition this which I shall not attempt to prove abstractedly from a comparison of the means of religion with the degenerate state of the mind to which they are applied, but from the consequent fact. If it shall appear, then, that far the greater part of those who enjoy them, are wholly uninfluenced by them, we have surely a farther strong presumptive proof, that some power need be added to these means, to make them efficacious. Now the fact is not to be disputed. The providence of God, and the preaching of the word, yea, men's own reason and conscience, do all, in many instances, concur, and operate powerfully, to urge them to the love and practice of religion: and yet they continue disobedient to it. This is the case of thousands, whilst one here and there, of less discernment it may be, and who enjoys fewer external advantages, becomes a willing convert to it.—Let us but cast our eyes around, and see how the matter stands, and sure I am this argument cannot but have its weight. Behold then,

1. The heathen sage instructing his disciples into the obligations of religion and virtue. That they ought to revere, love, and serve their Creator, he with good reason argues, from their having received their existence, and all their powers and enjoyments at his hands, from the fitness, beauty and excellence of virtue, from the exalted pleasure which the cultivation of it in-

spires, from the many temporal advantages which attend the practice of it, and from the displeasure of the Deity against vice and irreligion. And if any object the inconveniences and reproaches, which a severe attachment to religion may possibly draw on them, from the envy and malice of wicked men, he reminds them of the satisfaction of conscious innocency, of the high rank to which religion will exalt them above the grovelling multitude, of the applause of the wise and good, and the distinguished figure they will make in the annals of fame. Thus, with strength of reason, and with some elevation of passion, he exhorts men to be pious and good.

But what is the effect of all this florid declamation? Why, the greater part of his audience remain as totally unmoved as when he began. And as to those few who do become converts (if he really has any), to what are they converted? to the love of real religion? Ah, no! but rather, as the consequence too sadly proves, to the love of these present temporary rewards of it. They are persuaded, many of them it is to be feared, to renounce the abject tyranny of animal appetites, that they may enjoy the more refined bliss, which results from the gratification of vanity, ambition and pride. And so all the boasted fruit of these reasonings is, the exchange of one kind of servitude for another, perhaps less base, but in its effects more hurtful and dangerous.—Such are the triumphs of philosophy! "But," say you, "his want of success is to be imputed to the poverty of his arguments, and to the want of that authority which a divine revelation, and the certain assurance of a future state, would add to his reasonings." Let us then,

2. Change the scene from the schools of philosophy, to the assemblies where Christ is preached, and see what are the arguments here used to win men to the love and practice of religion. What are they then? the most exalted and animating that can be imagined.—Arguments supplied by infinite wisdom, founded on unquestionable authority, and addressed to all the feelings of the human heart. With artless simplicity, and unaffected earnestness, we hear the minister of Jesus telling men the miseries to which sin hath exposed them in this world, and in that which is to come; laying open to their view the mercies of God; assuring them of pardon and eternal life, through faith

in the mediation of his Son; and in Christ's stead beseeching them to be reconciled to God by him. We see him reasoning with them on the worth of the soul, the vanity of the world, the deformity of sin, the beauties of holiness, the joys of faith, the solemnity of death, the terrors of a future judgment, the bliss of heaven, and the torments of hell—explaining these high and weighty points—proving their truth—appealing to the consciences of men for their importance—and with all his persuasions mingling the most compassionate tears and prayers.—Now he warns, then entreats—Now he alarms, then soothes—Now addresses their fears, then their hopes—Now brings them 'to the mount that burned with fire, to blackness, darkness and tempest, the sound of a trumpet, and the voice of words;' then gently leads them *to Mount Sion*, whence are heard the softer and more endearing expressions of mercy and love. In short, duty and interest, with all the energy that truth, importance and pity can inspire, unite to enforce his reasonings.

Yet, is the effect such as might be reasonably expected, or as he fondly promises himself? Ah, no. One here and there only is moved by his reasonings, and sometimes none at all. So that with a sad and heavy heart he returns to his Master thus bitterly lamenting his unsuccessfulness: 'Lord, who hath believed my report? and to whom is thine arm revealed *a*?' 'I have called, but they have refused, I have stretched out my hand, but no man regarded: they have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof *b*.'

But you will object again—"There wants the concurrence of some external circumstances in providence, to fix men's attention to these reasonings, and to impress them upon their hearts. The reasoning is just and good," say you, "and well able, of itself, to persuade the will, and move the passions; but men's outward condition being easy and happy, they are apt to grow dull and phlegmatic, and of consequence inattentive to these matters. And this inattention is the true and proper cause of the unsuccessfulness of a Christian ministry." Let us see then how it is with the generality of mankind.

3. When roused by the voice of providence out of the fascinating sleep of self-indulgence, when stimulated to serious

a Isa. liii. 1. *b* Prov. i. 24, 25.

consideration by adversity in every form of it, and when addressed in this state by the kind of reasoning just described, disappointment and perplexity, poverty and want, sickness and death, stare them full in the face; and with these the faithful and affectionate minister joins issue, sounds the alarm of God's wrath in their ears, presses upon them the necessity of repentance, and wishes them to believe in Christ, and turn with their whole hearts unto God.—What is the effect now? Do they give proof of a change from the love of sin to the love of God and religion, and that they find themselves easily persuaded to the pursuit of holiness and goodness? Alas! with most the reverse is the case. They are roused. In their surprise they acknowledge religion to be true and important. And perhaps, in the warmth of their passions, resolve they will give heed to it. But the tempest of adversity having once subsided, and the bright scenes of prosperity succeeded to it, all their convictions, fears and resolutions vanish away. Examples of this sort are innumerable. It is a striking description the Scriptures give of such characters, when they tell us that their *goodness is as the morning cloud, and the early dew that passeth away a.* And their picture we have drawn to the life, in the instances of Herod and Felix, and of the Jews who attended the ministry of John the Baptist, and of our Saviour himself.—But we will carry the matter still farther, and suppose persons,

4. Not only startled, but convinced by the preaching of the word, thus enforced with the awakening calls of Providence—convinced, I say, fully and clearly in their judgments and consciences, that religion is as important as it is true. And yet still they have not a heart for it. It is not agreeable to them. It is not what they can delight in. Of this *they* must have seen a great deal who are used to converse with dying beds. What multitudes of people, in these circumstances, loudly declare their full satisfaction as to the truth of these things! But ah! they have no tendency, no disposition of heart to them! They know, they acknowledge they cannot be happy without having their nature renewed; and yet, while they seem to wish a renovation, that renovation is not effected. And is not this likewise the case with thousands in the midst of health and strength,

a Hos. vi. 4.

who are all their lives halting between God and Belial? They believe what you say to them upon this matter to be true; nay they will go perhaps so far as to take up your own arguments, and faintly reason with themselves upon them; and yet they will not, they cannot (so strangely are they infatuated by their lusts!) yield.

If, then, after all this, the tyranny of stubborn lusts is broken, and the heart becomes free to the service of God and religion, may it not, ought it not, must it not, be ascribed to the efficacious concurrence of a divine influence with the appointed means of conversion? And to this I persuade myself,

THIRDLY, *The doctrine taught in the Bible* agrees; so fully and clearly agrees, that we may put the issue of the whole matter upon the plain language of Scripture, with little or no comment of our own.

1. How then, in the first place, do the inspired writers represent the depraved state of human nature? They tell us that men are *dead in trespasses and sins a*; that their *understanding is darkened*; that their hearts are *alienated from the life of God b*; that they are *foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures c*; yea that their *carnal minds are enmity against God, not subject to his law, nor indeed can be d*. Strong expressions these! But you will perhaps say that they are applicable to the Gentile world only, and the state it was then in. Let the apostle reply: 'What then? Are we Jews better than these Gentiles? No, in no wise. Both Jews and Gentiles are all under sin. There is none righteous, no not one; there is none that understands, that seeks after God e.' And if such be the condition of mankind (as we have indeed already seen it is), and if Scripture thus establishes the fact; is not the presumption strong in favour of the important truth for which we contend? To go on,

2. Will not this presumption increase, whilst we listen to the humble and undisguised language of the first great missionaries from Heaven, when receiving and executing their instructions to a world sunk into this apostate state: whilst we listen, I say, to their acknowledgments and prayers to God, and to the pro-

a Eph. ii. 1. b Chap. iv. 18. c Tit. iii. 3.
d Rom. viii. 7. e Rom. iii. 9—11.

mises, hopes and encouragements given them in return? Can we hear an apostle, sensible of the infinite difficulty of reducing men to obedience, thus expostulating, *Who is sufficient for these things a?* An apostle, grieved on some occasions for the unsuccessfulness of his ministry, thus complaining, *Who hath believed our report b?* And an apostle, I will add, at other times, thus triumphing amidst a circle of numerous converts, 'The weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty, through God, to the pulling down of strong holds *c*?' Can we hear them all, prophets and apostles, humbly acknowledging that 'he who planteth is nothing, and he who watereth is nothing, but that it is God who gives the increase *d*;' all joining in one prayer, "Reveal O Lord, thine arm, make thy mighty power known!" and, in a word, their Master himself assuring them that he will shed his Spirit upon them, and be with them alway, even to the end of the world *e*? Can we, I say, hear all this, without believing, without acknowledging, without entering into the spirit of this divine doctrine? A doctrine which animated these primitive champions in their noble contention with the stubborn lusts of men, and gave them assured hope of victory, when an apostate world had triumphed over all the boasted reasonings of philosophy.

3. To this truth we find also the converts of earlier and later times, both when under their first serious impressions, and in the course of their experience afterwards, yielding a full and ready assent; assenting to it, not as a speculative point, a mere notion systematically taught them, and into which they were initiated by the solemnity of abstracted reasoning, but as a truth obvious to their first religious perceptions and feelings; and declaring their assent to it, not by the mediums of doctrinal confessions only, but by their prayers to God, the most natural and genuine way of expressing the practical sentiments of the mind about matters of religion. How spontaneously does such language as this flow from their hearts! 'Turn thou me, and I shall be turned *f*.' 'Create in me a clean heart, and renew within me a right spirit *g*.' 'Teach me to do thy will: thy Spi-

a 2 Cor. ii. 16. *b* Rom. x. 16. *c* 2 Cor. x. 4.
d 1 Cor. iii. 7. *e* Matt. xxviii. 20. *f* Jer. xxxi. 18.
g Psal. li. 10.

rit is good, lead me into the land of uprightness *a*.' 'Open my eyes that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law *b*.' 'Direct my ways to keep thy statutes *c*.' 'Incline my heart to thy testimonies *d*.' 'Quicken me according to thy word *e*.'—But the most direct and positive proof,

4. Arises from the account which Scripture gives of the work itself, and of the divine energy which begets and produces it in the heart. *The Lord thy God*, says Moses to the Israelites, *will circumcise thine heart to love the Lord f. Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power*, says David, when describing the numerous conversions which should distinguish the times of the Messiah *g*. *He shall put his fear in thee, and write his law in thine heart*, say the prophets *h*. *The new birth* our Saviour himself calls it, telling us, that it is *of the Spirit i*, and assuring us that *no man can come to him*, that is, believe in him to the great purpose of his salvation, *except the Father draw him k*. The apostles declare, that it is *God's workmanship l*; that *he who is in Christ is a new creature m*; that *the new man is created after God in righteousness and true holiness n*; that it is *God who quickens* and makes us alive *o*; that *faith is his gift p*; that *the exceeding greatness of his power* is manifested *towards them that believe, according to the working of his mighty power, which he wrought in Christ when he raised him from the dead q*; that it is *he who begins a good work in us, and performs it unto the day of Christ r*; *opens the heart to attend to the things that are spoken s, works in us to will and to do after his good pleasure t*, and *of his own will, begets us with the word of truth u*, which *comes not in word only, but in power x*; that they who believe in Christ *are born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God y*; and in fine, that *we are saved by the wash-*

a Psal. cxliii. 10. *b* Psal. cxix. 18. *c* Ver. 5.
d Ver. 36. *e* Ver. 25. *f* Deut. xxx. 6.
g Psal. cx. 3. *h* Jer. xxxii. 40. xxxi. 33. *i* John iii. 3, 6.
k John vi. 44. *l* Eph. ii. 10. *m* 2 Cor. v. 17.
n Eph. iv. 24. *o* Eph. ii. 4, 5. *p* Eph. ii. 8.
q Eph. i. 19, 20. *r* Phil. i. 6. *s* Acts xvi. 14.
t Phil. ii. 13. *u* James i. 18. *x* 1 Thess. i. 5.
y John i. 13.

ing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Ghost a. Such is the language of Scripture.

Since then it is so—That men have not this wisdom of which our text speaks naturally—That all human means to possess them of it are of themselves ineffectual—And that the Bible thus fully and strongly asserts the mighty influence of the Holy Spirit in the communication of it; it cannot, I think, with reason be questioned, that it is *from above.* Upon the whole; this,

1. Is a farther argument of the excellency of true religion. The value of a gift is not to be estimated by its intrinsic worth only, or by its utility to him who possesses it, but by the dignity and munificence also of the hand that bestows it. This consideration indeed adds a sweetness to all the outward comforts and enjoyments of life: for they are all the unmerited gifts of Heaven. And he who hath the quickest eye to discern a providence in the temporal good he possesses, knows best how to value and how to improve it. But a divine influence is more clearly observable in the communication of spiritual blessings. These are the gifts of his right hand, those of his left. These streams flow to us in a more direct channel than the other. And religion leads the happy man who enjoys it, by an easier and quicker ascent to God than mere nature. If the good Spirit of God then designs to pour this blessing into the heart, the consideration of his agency should surely brighten and exalt our ideas of its excellence, utility and importance.

2. Do we possess this most invaluable blessing? The inquiry is of the greatest consequence. It matters little whether we are great, or rich, or honourable, as to this world, if we are destitute of the fear of God. But this is *the one thing needful b*: that without which we must be miserable. *What will it profit a man, if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul c?* And this is that great blessing which dignifies, enriches, and makes happy all those who enjoy it. It is a *good portion* far better than any earthly possession: and *it shall never be taken away d.* Let us therefore be serious and faithful in the examination of our hearts upon this great point. And if it shall appear that we are endued with this heavenly wisdom, let us,

a Tit. iii. 5. *b* Luke x. 42. *c* Mark viii. 36. *d* Luke x. 42.

3. Give him the praise from whom we received it. It is *from above*; thither therefore our cheerful and grateful acknowledgments should ascend. Rivers will rise to the height whence they flow: so minds that came from God will return to him—return in lively expressions of joy and gratitude for his free and distinguishing goodness. It is not your temper, Christians, *to sacrifice to* your own *net*, or *to offer incense to* your own *drag a*. No. While you trace the hand of God in his dealings with you, admiration and wonder fire your breasts, praise and thanksgiving employ your tongues. "*Who* is it that *hath made* me *to differ? What* have I that is good which *I did not receive? By the grace of God I am what I am.*" Such is your language. You had not wherewith to purchase this blessing; you could not possess yourselves of it. O then never think you can praise God enough, for bestowing on you a gift so inestimable, and for inclining your perverse hearts to receive it; for opening your eyes to see your need of it, and for subduing your stubborn prejudices which would have prevented your accepting it. Praise surely is comely for the righteous! In one word,

4. If this wisdom is from above, then let me intreat those who are struck with its excellence and importance, and are convinced of their absolute need of it, to look for it from thence, and thence alone. A due conviction, Sirs, of your impotence and weakness will not induce despondency, nor will it cut the sinews of labour and industry. On the contrary, it will rather awaken your most serious regards to the gracious promise of the Holy Spirit, and excite your most diligent attention to the means of religion. O then! sensible of your deep poverty and misery, prostrate yourselves at the feet of the blessed God, and fear not to implore this inestimable gift at his hand, since he delights in nothing so much as gratifying the request of the poor and needy. Nay, you may consider it as an happy omen of his favour, that your hearts are disposed to seek it. Be earnest with him for the blessing. 'Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you *b*.'——'Labour for the meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you *c*.'—'Work out your own

a Hab. i. 16. *b* Matt. vii. 7.
c John vi. 27.

salvation with fear and trembling: for it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure *a*.'

DISCOURSE X.

CHRIST THE GRAND MEDIUM OF RELIGION.

EPH. II. 10.——*Created in Christ Jesus.*——

WHOEVER gives himself leave to reflect soberly on the present state of mankind, must, I think, acknowledge the indispensable necessity of the renovation of the heart, in order to the enjoyment of God. This is the great business of religion, and how it is effected hath been at large shewn in the preceding discourse. My present design is to consider more particularly than we have yet done, the concern which our Lord Jesus Christ hath in this great affair. *We are created in him.*

The scope of the apostle in this chapter is to shew us, that our salvation, by which he here means that part of it chiefly which respects our regeneration, is of grace. 'God who is rich in mercy,' says he, 'for the great love wherewith he hath loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ *b*.' And, having farther expressly declared, that we are 'saved by grace through faith,' he adds, 'and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not of works, lest any man should boast; for we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained, that we should walk in them.' Regeneration being the effect of divine energy and grace, it is most reasonable that God should have the glory of it. And good works being the end proposed by our regeneration, it is highly incongruous to consider them as the cause or motive, inducing the blessed God to save us; for if this were the case, there would be room for boasting, whereas now all boasting is excluded.

a Phil. ii. 12, 13. *b* Ver. 4, 5.

In the text then we have religion itself described—it is a *Building* and a *Creation;* and the interest which our Lord Jesus Christ hath therein—we are created *in him.*

As to the nature of internal or personal religion, that not being the object of this discourse, it may suffice to observe, that the animated description here given of it, tends to confirm what hath been already said, both of its excellence and importance, and of the divine influence exerted in its production. It is a *building* framed by exquisite skill, and reared by almighty power; and when the top-stone is brought forth, the happy spirits above will shout with one voice, Grace, Grace, unto it. It is also a *creation*—a new *creation.* God speaks the word, and behold light and order spring out of the dark and unformed chaos of the ignorant and depraved heart. So that of every one who is called by his name he says, 'I have created him for my glory, I have formed him, yea I have made him *a.*'

But our object at present is the interest which our Lord Jesus Christ hath in this great affair. We are created *in him.* To much the same purpose the apostle speaks, when he tells us of *Christ* being 'in us the hope of glory *b*;' and of his being 'formed in us *c*;' and of the *new man* being 'renewed in knowledge, after the image of him that created him *d.*' Now the sense is plainly this, that the religion of the heart, with all its powers and pleasures, some way or other, owes its original existence, and its continued support to our Lord Jesus Christ. In regard of this new kingdom, which God hath set up in the world, and in the hearts of men, Christ is *all in all e.*

I. This divine blessing is obtained for us through his mediation.

II. It is communicated to us by the influence of his Spirit.

III. It is produced, nourished, and improved, by the faith of his gospel. And,

IV. It is in its own nature, the impress of his image on our hearts and lives.

I. Religion is *the fruit of the mediation of Christ.*

Communion with God is the ground or foundation of religion. To this high privilege therefore, our first parents were admitted

a Isa. xliii. 7. *b* Col. i. 27. *c* Gal. iv. 19.
d Col. iii. 10. *e* Col. iii. 11.

in their innocent and perfect state; and the effect appeared in all that peace and happiness they enjoyed; and in all that cheerful obedience they for a while rendered to the will of God. But by the fall this original intercourse with Heaven was suspended. For it consisted not with the honour of the holy and blessed God, to converse with apostate men, nor were they in these unhappy circumstances capable of conversing with God. So was religion, that noblest guest that ever visited our world, by sin most shamefully driven out of it. Since however, it was the merciful design of God, to dwell again with men, and to diffuse the blessings of religion among them, it was fit some expedient should be devised, for restoring sinners upon honourable terms to the divine favour, for securing the return of the Holy Spirit to their hearts, and for rendering them capable of those divine pleasures which had been totally interdicted and withheld. This expedient was *the mediation of Christ.* A scheme wherein the perfections of God are most illustriously displayed, to the infinite admiration and joy both of angels and men.

As to the person of Christ, scripture gives us the most exalted descriptions of it, such as demand our highest homage and most profound reverence. He is *the only begotten,* the *well-beloved* and *eternal Son of God a. The brightness of the Father's glory, and the express image of his person b.* He *in whom dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily c. The true God and eternal life d. God over all, blessed for ever e.* This divine person consents to become a man, and so to unite humanity with deity. He is *Emmanuel, God with us f. God manifest in the flesh g.* And thus in the character of Mediator, he assumes all those offices, and undertakes all those arduous services, which were necessary to bring this difference between God and man, in the consequences of which both heaven and hell were concerned, to an happy and honourable issue.

The design was grand and noble. Early notices were given of it. A series of the most august and striking miracles opened the way for the execution of it.—In the fulness of time, behold! he appears, not in the grandeur of an earthly prince, but

a 1 John iv. 9.—Matt. iii. 17.—Mic. v. 2.—Heb. xiii. 8.
b Heb. i. 3. *c* Col. ii. 9. *d* 1 John v. 20.
e Rom. ix. 5. *f* Matt. i. 23. *g* 1 Tim. iii. 16.

in the humble form of a servant. He publishes the glad tidings of salvation with his own lips. Authenticates his mission with a kind of proof suited to the dignity and importance of it. Yields a cheerful and perfect obedience to the divine law. Suffers a most painful and ignominious death. Descends into the cold and silent grave. Triumphantly rises thence on the third day. And in that very nature, wherein he had thus bled and died, ascends through the clouds into heaven; where he now presides over the kingdom of providence and grace, and from whence he will quickly return to judge the world.—What an astonishing scene this! especially when viewed in connection with the grand design proposed, the redemption and salvation of his church. Sin, the greatest of all evils, is expiated. The demands of the law are fully satisfied. The rights of government, which ought ever to be held sacred, are inviolably maintained. An equitable constitution is established, upon the foundation of his infinite merit alone, for the justification and acceptance of the believing sinner. And, in a word, effectual provision is made for the rich effusion of all the great blessings of religion, as they have been illustrated and explained.

And that these were the great objects of his mission, scripture clearly teaches. He is the 'Mediator between God and us *a*;' 'the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sins of the world *b*;' 'no man can come unto the Father, but by him *c*;' he was 'set forth to be a propitiation for sin, through faith in his blood *d*;' 'in him God is reconciling the world to himself, not imputing their trespasses to them *e*;' 'for his sake he forgives us our sins *f*;' 'by his obedience many are made righteous *g*;' 'in him we are accepted *h*;' 'he is able to save them to the uttermost, who come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them *i*;' and, to add no more, 'by him grace reigns through righteousness unto eternal life *k*.' So that you see the blessed God can now converse with men, and men may be permitted, without the least dishonour reflected upon the divine attributes or law, to converse with God.

a 1 Tim. ii. 5. *b* John i. 29. *c* John xiv. 6.
d Rom. iii. 25. *e* 2 Cor. v. 19. *f* Eph. iv. 32.
g Rom. v. 19. *h* Eph. i. 6. *i* Heb. vii. 25.
k Rom. v. 21.

But to bring the matter still nearer to the point we have immediately in view. Scripture represents the mediation of Christ, as the actual and proper source of all the divine knowledge, hope and joy, and of all the real virtue, purity and religion, which is in the world. He is said to be entrusted with these great blessings, and to dispense them as he pleases. *He hath life in himself*, and gives it to whomsoever he will *a*. *It pleased the Father that in him all fulness should dwell b : and of his fulness we receive, and grace for grace c. In him are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge d. When he ascended up on high, he received gifts for men, yea even for the rebellious, that the Lord their God might dwell among them e.* And, in a word, *he was exalted to be a Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance unto Israel, and forgiveness of sins f.*

Through this channel, therefore, we may be sure, they who flourished in the earliest ages, dark as their notions might be of the Messiah, derived all the piety they possessed. And whatever there may now be of real religion, even in those parts of the world on which the gospel hath shone with the feeblest rays, it most certainly owes its existence to the mediation of Christ. No spiritual blessing is there dispensed to persons of any age, country, character or condition among men, but in this way. Christ is not the God of this or that set of professing Christians only, nor is he the author of divine benefits to us alone, under the present administration, but the head of the whole church, and the Saviour of every individual member of it. His religion, therefore, in this view of it, is not topical or limited to any particular spot, for wherever the true love and fear of God is, there is a pledge and fruit of his mediation and grace; and of all good men it may be affirmed, though their means of knowledge and experience may greatly differ, that they are *created in Christ Jesus.* He is *the author and the finisher of* their *faith.* Nor is there any name given under heaven, by which they either actually are or can be saved, but his. In short, all such as are *the workmanship of God*, in this sublime and spiritual sense, *are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus*

a John v. 21, 26.—Matt. xi. 27. *b* Col. i. 19. *c* John i. 16.
d Col. ii. 2. *e* Psal. lxviii. 18. *f* Acts v. 31.

Christ himself being the chief corner stone, in whom all the building, fitly framed together, groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord, and becometh *an habitation of God through the Spirit a.* He then is at the head of this new creation, of which indeed at present we have but very inadequate conceptions. He reigns sovereign over this empire, established in the hearts of thousands, in the most remote ages and distant parts of our earth.

And now, what a striking and exalted idea does this give us of the dignity and importance of our Saviour's divine and mediatorial character! And with what sentiments of gratitude and love should our breasts be inspired, amidst these reflections on his condescension and grace! *Will God indeed dwell with men?* not only send down his Spirit to reside in their hearts, but his own Son *to take flesh, and tabernacle among them?* How astonishing the thought—God incarnate!—He who made the world, an infant of days!—He who rules the universe, walking about the streets of Jerusalem, in the habit of a poor despised man!—He whom angels worship, languishing on a cross! We are lost in wonder.——

Nor are these facts alone the ground of our astonishment. The ends proposed are truly great and noble, and the contemplation of them fires our breasts with admiration and joy. What an illustrious display have we here of all the divine perfections, while we, at the same time, reap the richest fruits from this unparalleled condescension and goodness! God is glorified, and we are made happy. His honour and our interest are united in the man Christ Jesus. Exult, Christians, with joy unspeakable, while you reflect on these things. Behold the great Prophet of the church, shedding divine light upon your dark and ignorant minds, healing your mental diseases, and pouring life and joy into your dying souls. Behold the great High-Priest of your profession, offering himself a sacrifice to divine justice for your sins, and then pleading the merit of his death for your pardon and acceptance. Behold your King, swaying his sceptre over universal nature, subduing all the powers of darkness by his omnipotent arm, and conquering your hearts by the charms of his love and grace. View him in these, in all the characters he sustains, and then say how resplendently the divine glories

a Eph. ii. 20—22.

shine in the face of Christ, and what infinite obligations you owe to his mercy and goodness.—To his mediation then is to be ascribed the existence of religion, and all the blessings which result from it; on which account it may be truly said, that we are created in him. Again,

II. The vital powers of religion are communicated to the soul by the influence of *his* Spirit.

The agency of the blessed Spirit in regeneration hath been considered at large in the preceding discourse. All that is necessary therefore to be observed here, is, that the descent, inhabitation and influence of the Holy Spirit, are the happy fruits of the mediation of Christ. Hence he is styled *the Spirit of Christ a.* He is said to be given *in his name b.* And our Lord tells his disciples, that on his departure *he* would *send him to them c.* And the apostle declares, that he is *shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour d.* Since therefore, that divine power by which our hearts are renewed and made meet for heaven is obtained for us by the death and intercession of Christ, it may on this account, with good reason be said, that we are *created in him.* But the consideration on which I shall chiefly enlarge is,

III. That the faith of Christ, that is, of his doctrine and the revelation made in the Bible concerning him, is the main instrument by which religion is produced, nourished, and improved in the heart. *I live,* says the apostle, *yet not I, but Christ liveth in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me e.* Now it will be necessary, in order to set this matter in its proper light, to anatomize the heart of the Christian, and so, by laying open the religious affections of the soul, to shew how they are excited, moved and influenced by the faith of the gospel. To begin then,

First, With *Humiliation for sin.*

This is an eminent branch of piety. There can be no intercourse between us and an offended God, without a deep sense of our apostacy, ingenuous sorrow for our transgressions, a sincere desire of reconciliation, and an unfeigned resolution of

a Rom. viii. 9.—1 Pet. i. 11. b John xiv. 26.
c Chap. xvi. 17. d Tit. iii. 5, 6. e Gal. ii. 20.

future obedience. But the instructions and motives which the light of nature furnishes to these ends are evidently defective. We may indeed from thence, clearly collect in the general, that we are guilty, that it is highly fit we should be penitent, that the favour of God is most desirable, and that, since he does not instantly proceed to extremities, he may possibly have thoughts of mercy concerning us. Yet, the mind and conscience are so darkened and depraved by sin, that we do not fully discern the aggravations of our guilt and misery; and the ways of providence are so perplexed and various, that we cannot thence derive such notices of his mercy as are necessary to excite filial grief and penitence. Some farther discoveries therefore are requisite, in order to fix a deep impression on our hearts of our true state and condition, and to light up at least such a spark of hope there, as shall at once shew us our baseness, and cause us to relent ingenuously for our sins. Now these discoveries the gospel affords, and in a perfection that is truly amazing.

In subserviency to this great design, a new edition of the law is in the first place given us; the publication of which, on account of its immediate and necessary connection with the gospel, is to be considered as having the most useful and salutary tendency. It is given *that the offence may abound*, as the apostle expresses it, and that by reviving the dictates of conscience which were nearly obliterated, we may see our need of all that grace the gospel reveals. While therefore the sinner beholds the divine law delivered from mount Sinai, amidst the terrors of blackness, darkness and tempest, and while he hears its spirituality, extent and authority, explained by Christ and his apostles, he trembles at the apprehension of his guilt, finding it to be far more heinous, complicated and malignant than he before imagined. The voice of Moses is clearer, and sounds louder in his ears, than that of conscience; and the solemn transactions of a future judgment, as declared in the New Testament, rouse his fears in a manner, the reasonings of natural religion could not do. —"Men, brethren, What must I do?—Whither shall I flee?—How shall I escape the wrath that is to come?"—— Thus religion begins in conviction of sin, which conviction is awakened by the faith of God's holy law, dispensed with all this solemnity to prepare the way for the seasonable and happy

interposition of his grace. *I was alive, says the apostle, without the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died a.*

And now, need I tell you, on the other hand, how the gospel itself is adapted to soften the heart, thus roused and alarmed, into ingenuous sorrow and contrition for sin? Despair, the natural offspring of conviction, while it terrifies, hardens. But hope, that hope the gospel inspires, cherishes conviction, and improves it into repentance. The perfection indeed of the Saviour's obedience, and the bitterness of his sufferings, confirm the ideas just awakened in the sinner's breast, of the guilt and demerit of sin: but then the ray of hope thence darted on his mind, dispels the horrible and unavailing gloom of despondency which was gathering about him, and excites a kind of abasement and contrition in his heart, which are the very life and sinews of religion, the grand and leading principle of it. While by faith he beholds the Son of God meekly fulfilling the law *he* had broken, and patiently suffering death to expiate *his* violations of it, godly sorrow is quickened into life, and diffuses a warm glow of filial grief and ingenuous sadness through his breast. Surprised with the infinite mercy and grace of God in pardoning sins, many sins, heinous sins—in pardoning them at the expence of the blood of his own Son, blood shed in the most painful and ignominious manner—and in following the pardon with expressions of generosity and love which almost exceed belief; surprised, I say, with all this compassion and goodness, how does his heart relent! To the powerful impressions of all-conquering grace he yields. Before the God he had affronted and abused he bows. And smiting upon his breast, in the bitterness of his spirit, he cries out, "O that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for mine iniquities! Ah! what an ungrateful, base and treacherous wretch have I been, to crucify the Lord of life and glory, and to put him to open shame! Never did I behold sin in such horrible colours, or my own foolish and disingenuous heart in such a sad point of view, as I now see them. While I cast mine eye, O Jesus, to thy cross, and remember that my sins were the nails that fastened thee to it, and the spear that

a Rom. vii. 9.

drew the vital blood from thy heart, I mourn and am in bitterness as for an only son."

Thus is the faith of the gospel the powerful means of exciting repentance for sin. And it is by a growing acquaintance with the great mystery of redemption, which so amazingly heightens our conceptions of the divine glories, and draws such a shade over the pride of men, that all those amiable affections comprehended in the general idea of humility, are cherished and improved in the heart. He who enters by a lively faith into the spirit of the gospel, cannot fail of *being converted* and *becoming as a little child*, of *thinking soberly of himself*, yea of *abhorring himself and repenting in dust and ashes*. For to be created in Christ Jesus is to be thus *poor in spirit*, thus *meek and lowly in heart*.—Such is the tendency then of the doctrine of Christ in respect of that humiliation and abasement of mind, which is one eminent branch of religion.

PART II.

THE immediate respect which religion hath to our Lord Jesus Christ, is the subject under consideration. *We are created in him.* It owes its existence to his mediation—It is communicated by the influence of his Spirit—The faith of his gospel is the main instrument of its production and improvement—And it is the lively impress of his image and likeness. The two first have been considered, and we have entered on the third, which is indeed the main thing to be insisted on. Now, in order to set the influence which the faith of the gospel has upon religion in its proper light, I have proposed to consider it in reference to the several religious affections of the heart. We have begun with *humiliation for sin*. And we go on now,

SECONDLY, To *the joys of religion*.

These, as I have had occasion to shew you in a former discourse, spring from the pardon of sin—from interest in the providence and grace of God—from communion with Heaven on special occasions—and from a cheerful hope of eternal life. Now the faith of the gospel, we shall quickly see, hath a powerful and immediate influence on each of these particulars.

1. As to the pardon of sin, and acceptance with God. That man is truly blessed whose sins being forgiven, enjoys a peace-

ful conscience, and a heart gladdened with the divine favour and love. But what is it that possesses him of these invaluable blessings? It is confidence in the sacrifice, righteousness and mediation of Christ. *Him hath God set forth to be a propitiation for sin, through faith in his blood a. His righteousness is to all, and upon all them that believe b.* And *in him they are accepted c.* Upon these sure declarations of the blessed God himself, the humble penitent fastens, takes courage, lifts up his drooping head, and rejoices. He had stood trembling at the tribunal of conscience, awfully dreading the just sentence that hung over his guilty head. But with what new hopes and joys is his breast inspired, now he beholds Jesus the righteous advocate stepping forth to plead his cause? and hears him saying to his desponding heart, as Elihu said to Job, *Behold I am according to thy wish in God's stead: I also am formed out of the clay. Behold my terror shall not make thee afraid, neither shall my hand be heavy upon thee d.* "Now I know, says he, that God is just, while he pardons my sins, though so exceeding heinous; that he is righteous, while he accepts my person, though self-condemned; and that he is holy, while he receives me into his favour, though most vile and unworthy. At his altar I find refuge, for justice is appeased by the sacrifice offered thereon. At the throne of grace I bow, for it is sprinkled with the blood of Jesus. Thither I can now boldly come to ask for mercy. Mercy I ask—mercy I find—in mercy I will rejoice. O God, thou art my God through Christ.—How reviving is the thought!—Surely *thou hast put more gladness into my heart than they* enjoy, *whose corn and wine and oil are increased!*"

Thus doth faith minister joy to the Christian, in regard of these interesting points of forgiveness and acceptance with God. And O how desirable this joy! Who would not be glad to hear a voice from heaven proclaiming aloud, That God is pacified towards him, for his great and manifold transgressions; that he loves him with a tender and cordial affection; that his attributes are all become friendly to him; that there is now no condemnation to him; and that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate him from the love

a Rom. iii. 25. b Ver. 22.
c Eph. i. 6. d Job xxxiii. 6, 7.

of God? Who, I say, would not be glad to hear such a voice as this from the excellent glory? Well, but such a voice as this the blood of Christ speaks to every penitent and broken-hearted sinner; and with such divine evidence and authority, that it is highly criminal to question the truth of it. *Being justified by faith, we have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ a. We glory in God, through Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement b.* In like manner,

2. As to the influence of divine providence and grace. To have satisfaction that provision is made for our interests, both temporal and spiritual, all our way through life, must surely be a farther occasion of great cheerfulness and pleasure. Many a sad and gloomy thought, in respect of these matters, hath depressed the hearts of even good men themselves, in their moments of perplexity and unbelief. But how amazingly doth the doctrine of the gospel, apprehended by faith, dispel these dark clouds, and pour light and joy into the afflicted breast! It reveals the blessed Jesus, arrayed in majesty and glory, holding the reins of providence in his hand, and swaying his sceptre over the universe. To him it directs the eye of the dejected Christian, telling him how wisely, equitably and well the great Mediator adjusts the affairs of the world in general, and the concerns of those who fear him in particular; how happily he disposes every event, whether prosperous or adverse, so as best to promote the real good of his faithful people, numbering the hairs of their head, fixing the bounds of their habitation, defending their persons, assisting their labours, guiding their feet, and suffering them to want no good thing. At such tidings as these, how great are the triumphs of faith! How is the brow of adversity smoothed, and the tears of humanity dried up! How are curses converted into blessings, and the cup of affliction made palatable, if not pleasant! At such tidings as these, what new joys are infused into the comforts of life, and how is their flavour heightened and improved! "*The Lord*, even Jesus, *reigneth, let the* Christian *rejoice.*"

But the divine life, which is infinitely more important than the natural, needs likewise something daily to sustain and cherish it, to improve and defend it. Such provision the gospel

a Rom. v. 1. b Ver. 11.

makes. Substantial *food* it furnishes *to satisfy the hungry soul, gold tried in the fire to enrich* it, *white raiment to adorn* it, and *everlasting arms to support and protect* it. The person of Christ, his atonement, righteousness and intercession, his offices, grace and promises, are all subjects of the most pleasing contemplation, sources of the most divine consolation. Transcendently captivating must the beauties of his person be, who, though a man, *accounts it no robbery to be equal with God*, and *is the brightness of the Father's glory, and the express image of his person.* In him are hid treasures of wisdom and knowledge, of grace and love; to him the Christian is united by an indissoluble bond; and from his fulness he receiveth and grace for grace. Great therefore must be the bliss which the good man feels, while by a lively faith he dwells on these sublime truths. How does the sight of Christ animate him to his duty, and make him forget the pains and fatigues which attend it! Like the men of Bethshemesh, how does he shout amidst the toils and labours of the field, at the approach of the ark, the symbol of the divine presence and glory! At the view of him whom his soul loveth, how are his broken spirits revived in a time of adversity! how is his feeble heart sustained in the hour of death! and how noble a superiority does he obtain over all the powers of darkness! "*Through Christ who strengtheneth me*, with triumph he cries, *I can do all things. His grace is sufficient for me. I will glory*, yea, *I will take pleasure in infirmities, that his power may rest upon me.*"

3. Communion with God on special occasions, is likewise another source of religious joy. To contemplate the divine perfections displayed in his works, and to breathe out the soul to him in prayer and praise, must be an animating and improving exercise to a renewed mind. But how is this to be even attempted with any degree of pleasure, if no regard be had to Christ? Can a creature, conscious to itself of guilt and rebellion, with composure approach the awful presence of provoked Omnipotence? Can a heart defiled with sin enjoy itself in the immediate view of spotless holiness?—It cannot. So averse is the sinner to communion with God, that he instantly shrinks back at the very idea of that great Being. And when conscience, Heaven's vicegerent, forces him into some kind of intercourse

with Deity, saying, *Where art thou?* with consternation he replies, like the first man, *I heard thy voice, and was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself a.*

But how is the scene changed, when by faith he apprehends the blessed Jesus, in the character of Mediator, standing between him, a guilty polluted criminal, and God his infinitely just and holy Judge! The conceptions he now forms of the supreme Majesty, though still awful and tremendous, are softened with a pleasing mixture of gentleness and love. In this new and living way he can have access, with confidence, to the object he before dreaded; and can enjoy those meditations on the perfections and works of God, which were before painful and distressing. The angel of the covenant having laid his hand upon him, and said, 'O man greatly beloved, fear not, peace be unto thee, be strong, yea, be strong;' he instantly recovers new strength, and replies with the prophet, 'Let my Lord speak, for thou hast strengthened me *b*.' Emboldened by the intercession of this able and righteous advocate, he can bow before the Almighty with holy freedom; and through this medium discover new glories in the blessed God, such as far surpass all those other notices of him which nature or providence furnish. Now he sees 'mercy and truth meeting together, righteousness and peace kissing each other *c*.' And how does he exult at the pleasing sight! It gives new energy to his addresses, puts him in possession of the blessings he seeks, at the instant he is asking them, and unites prayer and praise in one breath. And then, once more,

4. As to the hope of heaven; I hardly need tell you it is by all acknowledged to be a just occasion of gladness and joy. To be persuaded that when this mortal life is ended I shall enter on a state of existence the most happy, and which shall suffer no change, how reviving, how transporting the thought! But whence can we collect a just idea of that state, a satisfactory proof of the reality of it, and such considerations as may reasonably encourage our hope of possessing it, except from the doctrine of Christ? A general hint of that future world once thrown out may indeed set imagination at work; and the sallies of an active and sprightly fancy in this way may entertain and please.

a Gen. iii. 10. *b* Dan. x. 18, 19. *c* Psal. lxxxv. 10.

But imagination and fancy are very insufficient grounds for substantial hope and joy. This however is not the case here. The eye of faith, assisted by the discoveries which Christ hath made, descries the good land, though afar off, with a clearness which sense and imagination cannot pretend to; assures us of the reality of it upon principles which nature and reason cannot of themselves suggest; and induces a hope of personal interest in it which is as rational as it is cheerful and animating. And hence Christ is emphatically said to be 'in us the hope of glory *a*.'

What are all the fond conceits of heathen poets, when mentioned at the same time with the exalted descriptions of heaven, drawn by the pens of prophets and apostles? What the puerile and uncertain reasonings of philosophers, founded at best on mere probabilities, when compared with the commanding evidence resulting from the resurrection and ascension of the Son of God? And what the flattering expectation which comparative goodness, and a general persuasion of the mercy of God inspire, when put in the scale with the hope built on the mediation of Christ, and the express promise of the Bible, and which, at the same time, approves itself genuine, by its suitable influence on our tempers and lives? Such a hope is truly noble and divine, and when in lively exercise cannot fail of reviving the heart, and gladdening the countenance. 'The joys of faith,' as the apostle somewhere expresses it, have, in many instances, balanced the most grievous sorrows of the present life, and enabled him, who was naturally the most timorous, to rush fearless into the arms of death. And though, alas! through various causes, our hopes are many times at a low ebb, yet the gospel hath the same aspect it ever had on our future interests, and faith the same power to brighten, realize and appropriate unseen and eternal things.—Thus, in the joys of religion, you see the faith of Christ hath an intimate and immediate concern. And the like concern it hath,

THIRDLY, In that *Purity of heart* which is the very essence of religion.

If there be such a thing as religion, it must consist in a reverential fear, and sincere love of God, in a cordial desire, and dili-

a Col. i. 27.

gent aim and endeavour to mortify our secret corruptions, in a sovereign contempt of this world, when put in competition with another, and in fervent aspirations of heart after likeness to God, and the everlasting fruition of him in heaven. Now the faith of the gospel is the most direct and effectual, nay the only means, with a divine influence, to inspire us with this divine temper.—The only means, I say; for the reasonings of natural religion are too feeble to compass these great objects: as he surely must be sensible, who is at all acquainted with the history of mankind, and as I have largely shewn in the preceding discourse. How slowly hath the business of even external reformation advanced, when attempted upon principles of philosophy and speculation only! Nay, with the aid of human laws, how difficult have moralists found it to hold men within the bounds of common decency! Will, then, their reasonings, will their persuasions, forcible and eloquent as they may be, turn the tide of corrupt nature, root up inveterate passions, subdue men's inordinate love of the world, and raise their hearts to God? Ah! no. It were an idle thing, as experience hath shewn, to expect it. But the faith of the gospel challenges all these difficulties. It may, it hath subdued kingdoms of vice and sin firmly established in the hearts of men; wrought righteousness, in opposition to all the efforts of Satan; stopped the mouths of angry passions that have roared like lions; quenched the violence of fierce lusts that have raged like fire; and put to flight the armies of hell and death.

Here I might shew you how this faith operates in regard of all the powers of sin and holiness, and how the considerations the gospel suggests are levelled against every secret corruption, and adapted to excite, strengthen, and promote every opposite grace. But it were endless to be particular. Nor need I, since you have already seen the influence of this faith to produce godly sorrow for sin. In general, *He who hath this hope in him, purifieth himself as God is pure* [a]. It is an exalted and pleasing idea, which Christ hath given us of the blessed God, and of the duty we owe him, in his own person and doctrine. In him, *the only begotten of the Father, who is full of grace and truth* [b], *we behold the glory of God*; and *beholding it as in a*

[a] 1 John iii. 3. [b] John i. 14.

glass, how *are we changed*, after our measure, into the divine likeness, *by the Spirit of the Lord a!* How does the indignation he hath expressed against sin, in the death of his Son, vehemently provoke our detestation of this the greatest of all evils! How does a believing reflection on the sorrows and sufferings of Christ for our disingenuity and folly, aid us in our struggles with powerful lusts! And how doth the mercy and love he hath herein manifested to our immortal souls, sweetly constrain us to the love of holiness! *We fear the Lord and his goodness b*, while we here see all his attributes shining in their native lustre, and, at the same time, harmonizing in our favour. And we feel ourselves moved by the gratitude the gospel inspires, to the practice of truth and justice, of meekness and patience, of purity and self-denial, to contempt of the world, and an ardent pursuit of divine and heavenly objects. *The grace of God which hath appeared unto us, teaches us to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously and godly, in this present evil world c.* And *the love of Christ constraineth us, to live not unto ourselves, but unto him who died for us d.* Surely he who by faith contemplates the scheme of redemption, who realizes it, and enters into the spirit of it, cannot fail of having his heart by these means refined from the dregs of sin and sense, and elevated to God. *I, if I be lifted up*, says Christ, *will draw all men unto me e*—draw them from the love of sin to the love of God.

The exalted piety and devotion of the apostles and primitive saints are truly admirable. But how did they attain to these noble heights? It was by the knowledge and faith of the gospel. This was *the water of life*, which, while it refreshed their drooping spirits, quenched their eager thirst after terrestrial joys and pleasures. The more largely they drank of these living streams, the more pure and spiritual were their hearts. This it was that crucified them to the world, and the world to them. This was the armour in which they clad themselves, for all their conflicts with sin and sense. Strengthened with this divine faith, they entered the lists with the world, and obtained a brave superiority over its flatteries and frowns. They knew no

a 2 Cor. iii. 18. *b* Hos. iii. 5. *c* Tit. ii. 11, 12.
d 2 Cor. v. 14, 15. *e* John xii. 32.

religion but what had Christ for its foundation, and what owed its existence and improvement to the influence of his Spirit. *Christ* with them was *all in all.* It was therefore through him, through his doctrine and grace, they became such mirrors—such examples of humility, meekness, fortitude, and every other heavenly virtue. Through those *exceeding great and precious promises*, of which Christ possessed them by his gospel, they were made *partakers of the divine nature a;* they *cleansed themselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God b;* and willingly consecrated their hearts living temples to the worship and service of the living God.

PART III.

We have seen how the faith of the gospel tends to excite and promote in the heart, repentance, joy, and purity. Let us now consider,

Fourthly, The influence it hath upon that divine *charity and friendship*, which are on all hands acknowledged to be one eminent branch of religion.

Motives no doubt there are innumerable, without recurring to the Christian scheme, which may with advantage be urged to persuade us to the love of God and our neighbour. While reason within silently teaches us, that God is the most perfect of all beings, and while the works of creation and providence around us, loudly proclaim his greatness and goodness, evidence cannot be wanting to convict that man of miserable disingenuity and folly, who doth not admire, adore, and love his Creator and Preserver. And while those bands of nature subsist, which unite men in one body, and make them mutual sharers in each other's interests, no one can claim an exemption from obligations of sympathy, benevolence, and friendship. Yet forcible as these reasonings—these feelings may be, and indeed are, how wretchedly defective are the generality of mankind in these two great points of duty! It is a fact to be credited, not on the authority of scripture only, for experience and observation sufficiently attest it, that 'the carnal mind is enmity against God,' and that the greater part of the world 'live in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another.' Sad reflection this!—Charity

a 2 Pet. i. 4. b 2 Cor. vii. 1.

nevertheless there is. But this fair and pleasant fruit, if genuine, is of divine growth. It is the offspring of faith. It is a lesson no where taught with such clearness, as in the school of Christ, and a temper no where imbibed so freely and largely, as at the pure fountain of his doctrine.

1. As to God, how powerful are the arguments by which we are here allured to the love of him! The virtues of a finite being, though shaded with many imperfections, command the esteem and reverence of beholders, even of those who are not immediately benefited by them. But what are all the charms of the fairest character on earth or in heaven, when compared with those of the blessed God, as exhibited to our view in the gospel of his Son! His excellencies are here displayed in the most inviting light, and our admiring eyes are held fast to this the most amiable of all objects, by the goodness as well as the beauty that thence beams on us. 'God is love, and he that dwelleth in love, dwelleth in God, and God in him *a*.' Nature, whilst she pours her bounties upon us, points to him as our Benefactor, and bids us adore and love him. But how much louder, more authoritative, and commanding, is the voice of faith! How irresistibly persuasive are her arguments, whilst she proclaims in our ears the free pardon of infinite offences, and the sure promise of everlasting happiness, telling us that these are blessings obtained for us, at the expence of the tears and sufferings of the Son of God?

Love begets love, and the effect will bear some resemblance to the cause. But what expression of love like that of God's sending his own Son to die for rebels? Can I believe this great truth—can I enter into the true spirit of it—can I hope, or even only imagine myself interested in it, and not catch fire at the thought? 'Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friend; but God commendeth his love towards us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us *b*.' O the height, the depth, and the length of the love of God in Christ Jesus! 'It passeth knowledge *c*.' The lively faith of this amazing expression of divine mercy and grace, must needs kindle in the heart a flame of gratitude to God.—Fall down, Christian, at the feet of this infinitely glorious Being.

a 1 John iv. 16. *b* Rom. v. 8. *c* Eph. iii. 19.

Admire and adore his transcendent excellencies. Dwell in your contemplations on them, till you are dissolved in love, and thereby in your measure assimilated to his likeness, who is the fountain of all beauty, perfection, and happiness. And then,

2. As to men; no arguments surely have such mighty force in them to persuade us to mutual love, as those the gospel suggests. What amazing philanthropy is that which disposeth the blessed God to take human nature into union with deity; and inclines his own Son to suffer the pains of death, that enemies may become sharers, not of mercy only, but bounty; not of sympathy only, but delight and love! This great truth impressed on the heart, must needs strengthen the natural ties of humanity, and bind men faster to one another in love and friendship than ever. Is must needs dilate the mind of man, and make it capable of embracing millions of immortal beings in the arms of pure benevolence. It must needs soften the rugged and unyielding affections of the soul, and fill the breast with sentiments of tenderness, generosity and love. 'Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren *a*.'

How can wrath, hatred and revenge lift up their heads at the foot of *his* cross, whose blood expiated the guilt of those who cruelly and maliciously shed it? How can *he* obstinately refuse to forgive another a few injuries, who hath himself been forgiven great and numerous offences? And how can *he* be insensible to the sufferings of his fellow-Christians, who by faith has had fellowship with Christ in his?—Behold the Saviour, Christian, who, 'though he was rich, for your sake became poor, that you through his poverty might become rich;' and then ask yourself, Whether you can shut your bowels of charity against the distressed? Stand by him whilst weeping over Jerusalem; and tell us, Whether you can refrain mingling your tears with his, for the miseries impenitent sinners are bringing upon themselves? Be a witness of the tender scenes which passed between him and his disciples, especially at the close of his life; and say, Whether those natural, friendly and religious affections you owe towards those around you, are not refined, softened and improved by these views? "See how the Christians love one another,"

a 1 John iii. 16.

was a common observation in primitive times. And the apostle John hath with good reason made this a mark or evidence of the new birth, *We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren; he who loveth not his brother, abideth in death a.*

Thus have we seen how religion, in all these various expressions of it, is produced, nourished and improved by the faith of the gospel.—It now remains to be considered, as a farther illustration of the regard it hath to Christ,

IV. That religion is in its own nature an imitation of his temper and example.

The regenerate are *created in Christ*, that is, fashioned after his image and likeness. To him they bear a near resemblance, as children do to their parents; and as the wax does to the seal whence it receives the impression. To which purpose, the apostle tells the Romans, that God had predestinated them *to be conformed to the image of his Son b;* and in the warmth of his affection, assures the Galatians, that he travailed in birth for them, till *Christ was formed in them c.* As in the first creation, man was made after the image of God, so in the second, after that of the Lord Jesus. Wherefore his temper and conduct, when here on earth, may be considered as a delineation of religion in its highest perfection. He appeared, it is true, in our world, with other and more important views than that of becoming our example; yet this is expressly declared to be one. *He hath left us an example that we should follow his steps d.*

And in what an amiable and striking light doth his example appear, as it is drawn out to our view by the evangelists! I cannot now enter into the particulars of it, or I might tell you of the truth, sincerity and uprightness of his heart; of the sweetness, tenderness and goodness of his disposition; of his humility, meekness and patience; of his temperance, self-denial and fortitude; of his piety towards his Father, and his compassion to men. I might shew you with what heavenly and unremitting lustre and glory, these divine graces shone out in the whole of his deportment. I might for the illustration of them, refer you

a 1 John iii. 14. *b* Rom. viii. 29.
c Gal. iv. 19. *d* 1 Pet. ii. 21.

to his public sermons, his familiar discourses, his private devotions, his unwearied labours to do good; to the miracles he daily wrought, and the various and unparalleled sufferings he endured. I might, in a word, call upon his parents, his brethren, his disciples, his countrymen, yea his enemies themselves, to bear witness to the integrity of his life, the purity of his manners, and the transcendent brightness and perfection of his obedience.

And now, what is the religion of the heart and the genuine expressions of it in the life of a real Christian, but a copy, a faint copy at least, after this bright and perfect pattern? It is indeed impossible for us in the present state to resemble Christ exactly. Yet his example is the standard to which we should aim to arrive, and by which we should frequently try ourselves, in order to come at a due knowledge and sense of our defects and imperfections. And it is our singular advantage that we have such a fair pattern before our eyes: for here we are not only instructed in the perfect will of God, but we have it drawn out to our view in living characters, and are urged to obedience by motives of the most generous and animating nature. It is the example of him who lived and died for us; so that while we are bound by every possible consideration, to attempt at least the imitation of it, we are at the same time secured by the grace of the gospel, from that slavish fear and dread, with which the not succeeding to that perfection we wish would otherwise inspire us.

And may I not affirm that there have been, that there still are, some happy persons who are thus *created in Christ Jesus?* Look around the circle of your acquaintance, Sirs, and see whether you cannot fix your eyes upon one here and there, in whom is *the same mind as* was *in him?* who is meek and lowly in heart, cautious and circumspect in his behaviour, contented and cheerful in the station Providence hath placed him, patient amidst the trials and sufferings of life, lively and fervent in the discharge of religious duties, glad of every opportunity to do good, sensible of his own defects and imperfections, apt to believe others better than himself, and cordially disposed to give God the glory of his salvation? Amiable character this! And now, whose image doth this man bear? *You* will say, it is the image of Christ; and *he* will gratefully acknowledge, that it is

the grace of Christ which hath formed him into this temper. *By the grace of God I am what I am a.*

Thus have I shewn you, that the religion of the heart, with all the powers and pleasures of it, owes its existence and support to the Lord Jesus Christ. It is a blessing obtained for us through his mediation—communicated to us by the influence of his Spirit—produced, nourished and improved by the faith of his gospel—and in its own nature, the impress of his image on our hearts and lives. And thus are we *created in Christ Jesus.*

With two or three reflections I shall close this subject.

1. From what hath been said, we see the insufficiency of natural religion; an observation which hath frequently occurred in the course of this sermon. Alas! what a vain empty thing must that piety—that devotion be, which hath no regard to the Lord Jesus Christ; or which, if it doth pay some general regard to him, yet considers him not as the grand medium of religion! If it be true that he rose from the dead, it is also true that there is no coming to God but by him. He hath himself said so. And methinks a sober and impartial reflection on the fallen state of mankind, would of itself, go a good way towards convincing men in the general, that something farther must be necessary to recover them from their apostacy, and to restore them to the likeness of God, besides what the light of nature is capable of discovering. The evidence, however, attending the mission of Christ, is so grand and striking, and the explanation which the apostles give us of his doctrine, is so sublime and exalted, that he who believes the one, and hath any just idea of the other, cannot possibly treat revelation with indifference—with indifference I say, as if it contained matters which we might have remained totally ignorant of, with little or no inconvenience whatsoever. The religion of the Bible is an animating thing. But that of mere nature is attended with doubts not to be solved by reason, and with difficulties not to be surmounted by humanity. If ever therefore, we are *created* anew, it must be *in Christ Jesus.* If ever we are admitted to communion with God, it must be through his mediation. And if ever we possess the real spirit of vital religion, it must be by the faith of his doctrine and grace. To Christ therefore,

a 1 Cor. xv. 10.

2. Let our eyes and hearts be constantly directed, in all the great concerns we have to transact with Heaven. Venture not, sinner, to approach God in any other way than by the sacrifice, righteousness and intercession of his Son. Such an attempt will be deemed the height of ingratitude and presumption, it will aggravate your guilt, and will be sure to draw upon you the divine resentment. If you *will* think of appeasing justice by your repentance, or of meriting the favour of God by your future obedience, you must take the consequence of this bold rejection of Christ and his grace. 'Behold all ye that kindle a fire, that compass yourselves about with sparks; walk in the light of your fire, and in the sparks that ye have kindled. This shall ye have of mine hand,' saith the Lord, 'ye shall lie down in sorrow *a*.' 'There is no name given under heaven, by which you can be saved, but the name of Christ *b*.' 'How' then 'will you escape, if you neglect this great salvation *c*?'

And there being such a medium of access to God, how great is the encouragement which from hence arises to him who is sensible of his guilt and misery, who wishes above all things to be reconciled to his offended Creator, and hungers and thirsts after the substantial blessings of religion! *Come unto me*, says the Saviour himself, *all ye that labour, and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest d*. Why should you then yield to despondency? Why should you perplex yourselves with doubts and fears? God is infinitely merciful, and he is just, while he is the justifier of him who believeth in Jesus. Christ is able to save them to the uttermost, who come to God by him; and he hath declared he will in nowise cast them out. Fly to him by faith. Intrust your concerns in his hands, and be assured all will be well.

Nor let those who have known Christ, and believed in him, ever lose sight of him in the exercises of their hearts about divine things. Fix your eye, Christian, upon him in all his characters and offices, as your prophet to instruct you, as your priest to make reconciliation for you, and as your King to rule in your heart, and to subdue your enemies. Look steadily to him; and so make your humble approach to God in the duties of religion;

a Isa. l. 11. *b* Acts iv. 12.
c Heb. ii. 3. *d* Matt. xi. 28.

so arm yourself for your conflicts with sin, Satan and the world; and so be prepared to endure the troubles of life, to submit to the stroke of death, and to appear before the tribunal of the great God.

3. What gratitude and cheerfulness should possess our hearts, while we thus reflect on that happy and glorious medium of intercourse, which the blessed God hath appointed between him and us? The wisdom of this constitution is not fully to be comprehended by us, and the goodness of it surpasses all imagination. Yet enough, surely, we know, both of the wisdom and goodness of it, to inspire our breasts with joy and gladness, with admiration and praise. May the contemplation of this amazing scheme of salvation be our frequent and noblest entertainment, in our way through this world! and at length may we arrive at that happy state, where we shall see as we are seen, and know as we are known! Then will the prayer, which the suffering Jesus addressed to his Father, in the days of his flesh, be fully answered, to the infinite satisfaction of all his faithful disciples, *Father, I will that they whom thou hast given me be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory a.* But I must not close without reminding you,

4. And lastly, Of the strong obligations which all this grace lays upon you, Christians, to universal obedience. *Ye are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained, that you should walk in them.* It is fit that *he* who hath reared this spiritual building, and who hath brought this new creation into existence, should have the honour, as well as *you* the comfort and convenience of it. And how can you better magnify the riches of his grace, than by demeaning yourselves in all things, as becometh Christians! *Let your light* then *so shine before men, that others seeing your good works may glorify your Father who is in heaven b.*

a John xvii. 24. b Matt. v. 16.

DISCOURSE XI.

THE MEANS OF IMPROVEMENT IN RELIGION.

2 PET. III. 18.—*But grow in grace*——

WITH this short but comprehensive exhortation the apostle Peter closes his second and last epistle. An epistle directed to Christians in general, whom he describes as having *obtained like precious faith with himself, through the righteousness of God, and our Saviour Jesus Christ.* It was wrote not long before his decease; for he expressly says towards the beginning of it, that he should *shortly put off* his *tabernacle, as the Lord Jesus Christ had shewed him a.* So that if age, experience, and the solemnity of approaching death, may be supposed to add any weight to the advice of an inspired apostle; the words of the text, which stand thus at the close of the epistle, do on these accounts claim our most serious and affectionate attention.

With great earnestness he had just cautioned us, for to us he addresses himself as well as the primitive Christians, against apostacy. A caution peculiarly seasonable, as it had been the main business of the epistle to expose the impieties, errors and declensions of the last times, and to represent the solemn process of the last judgment. *Seeing therefore, beloved, ye know these things, beware lest ye, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own stedfastness.* On the contrary, let me beseech you with my dying breath, and the rather as it will be the most effectual security against apostacy, to make it your solicitous concern *to grow in grace.*

By *Grace* is sometimes meant the love and favour of God, sometimes the gospel in opposition to the law, and sometimes the inward experience of religion. In this last sense it is to be understood here. So that to *grow in grace* is to improve in the divine life, or in those dispositions, affections and virtues which constitute a real Christian. Now that there are degrees

a Chap. i. 14.

of grace, or that the religion of the heart is capable of improvement, will hardly admit of a question. Grace as to its nature is the same in every good man, but as to its degree it greatly differs. Otherwise, whence the descriptions which so frequently occur in Scripture, of *sheep* and *lambs*, of *new born babes*, *children*, *young men* and *fathers in Christ?* And whence is it the apostles speak in their epistles of feeding some with milk and others with meat? Nay this is evidently supposed in all those passages, wherein our Saviour is represented as condescending to the weaknesses of his people, and adapting himself to their various different capacities. *The sheep he leads*, and *the lambs he carries in his bosom.* And the figure alluded to in our text sufficiently proves and illustrates what I am here observing. *Grow in grace.*

Grace is at first like a tender plant, which makes an unpromising appearance, and is in danger of being nipped by every sudden blast: yet in time it grows, gathers strength, spreads its leaves, and becomes capable of enduring the sharpest weather. *It is like a grain of mustard seed, which*, as our Saviour says, speaking of the kingdom of heaven, *is indeed the least of all seeds, but when it is grown is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof a.* Steadiness and experience are the perquisites of age; and a considerable time will pass, ere the principles of grace take deep root in the heart, and the blossoms of early religion ripen into fair and substantial fruit. Which being the case, there is sufficient ground for the idea suggested in our text. And however growth in religion is to be ascribed to a divine influence; yet it is with good reason made a subject of exhortation, since that influence is only to be expected in the use of means, which are unquestionably within our compass. What I propose therefore in this discourse is,

I. To recite and explain some of the principal means of religion:

II. To lay down some plain rules to direct us in our use of them; and,

III. To attempt by proper motives to excite our attention to them.

a Matt. xiii. 31, 32.

I. As to the means of religion. There are some of a more general kind, and which have immediate respect to our daily temper and behaviour; and others which come more directly under the notion of religious duties. Of the former kind the first I shall mention is,

1. *Watchfulness against all occasions of sin.* This indeed, to speak properly, is rather a means to prevent the decay of religion, than to promote its growth and improvement. Grace and sin are in direct opposition to each other. And could we suppose the Christian capable of wilfully indulging his corruptions, such indulgence would quickly sap the foundation of all good dispositions and affections, and endanger, to say the least of it, a total apostacy. But though it is promised sin shall not have dominion over him, yet he is liable to be surprised into sin. And every act of sin, besides the pain and misery it occasions, tends to strengthen the principle whence it proceeds, and of consequence to weaken the opposite principle of grace and religion. All occasions therefore or temptations leading to this great evil should be carefully guarded against.

Now to be properly apprised of these is one great and eminent part of our duty. There is indeed no object we are conversant with but may become an occasion of sin. Which makes it necessary that we keep a strict watch on all our passions, appetites and senses. But there are certain connections, amusements and concerns of life, which, though not absolutely unlawful in themselves, may prove snares to us. To recite them particularly would be endless, because they are almost infinitely diversified. Be they however what they may, we should at least give ourselves time to consider of them, and the danger to which they may expose us, before we have any thing to do with them. And unless we are clearly warranted to engage in them, and have sufficient ground to believe we shall be superior to the temptation of them, it is unquestionably our duty to stand at a distance from them. Good men are usually in greater danger from the occasions and appearances of sin, than from the open attacks of sin itself. Direct solicitations to criminal actions they will peremptorily withstand, when perhaps, through a presumption of their own strength, and a vain notion of not expressly violating any known law, they will be easily in-

duced to venture on what hath a remote tendency to such actions.

Now when this is the case, when one who calls himself our friend presses us on fair pretences to associate with evil company, to divert ourselves with idle amusements, to which we have no sufficient call either by reason or providence, or for the sake of worldly gain, to enter into this or the other connection that is forced and unnatural; if we were to make a bold stand, and absolutely refuse to comply, what a deal of mischief might we not prevent—prevent all those sad languors of a declining constitution, and those bitter sorrows and reflections of heart we so often feel and lament! Watchfulness therefore, constant watchfulness, is indispensably necessary to this end. 'My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not *a*.' 'Let him who thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall *b*.' 'Watch and pray that ye enter not into temptation *c*.'

2. Another still more direct means of improvement in religion is *Self-knowledge*. There can indeed be no real religion without it. The right exercise of every Christian temper, whether towards God, ourselves, or one another, supposes it and depends greatly upon it. But alas! this of all sciences is the most difficult to be attained. And it having been in a degree attained, at our first becoming Christians, we yet for the most part make but a very slow progress therein. The principal reasons of which are doubtless these: a certain consciousness we each of us have that we are not what we ought to be, which makes us averse to an acquaintance with ourselves; and a continual busy intimacy with sensible objects, which diverts our attention from reflection and self-examination.

Now there are two rules, which, if duly attended to, would be of excellent use to promote *self-knowledge*. The one is, the inuring ourselves to watch the motions and operations of our hearts. And the other is, the making it our business, at certain periods, to look back on our past temper and conduct. It is, I know, extremely difficult, and perhaps absolutely impossible, for a man on every occasion to possess himself of his own thoughts, that is, to reflect minutely, and immediately, on transactions which have just passed in his breast. So various are

a Prov. i. 10. *b* 1 Cor. ix. 12. *c* Matt. xxvi. 41.

the concerns of life, and so quick are the reasonings of the mind upon them, that were we every minute to make a pause, and solemnly call up to our view what had at that instant escaped us, the necessary business of our stations would be considerably impeded, if not wholly obstructed. Yet there is such a thing as a man's being accustomed to keep a guard upon himself, and his making a point of it to watch the temper of his heart upon critical occasions. By critical occasions, I mean those wherein our integrity, and our religious regard to God and our duty, are put to any remarkable trial. A facility in this practice is what some Christians, with divine assistance, have acquired in a very happy degree.

The advantages which result from hence are obvious at first view. Were we, for instance, narrowly to observe our own reasonings, when solicited to a matter about the lawfulness of which we were doubtful, or carefully to eye our tempers, when engaged in any solemn religious duty, we could hardly fail reaping some considerable addition to *self-knowledge*. And though such strict observation of ourselves might be fruitful of many unpleasing reflections, yet these reflections would lay an immediate foundation for godly sorrow, which is one eminent branch of religion, and would teach us many a useful lesson for the regulation of our future conduct. Humility, self-diffidence, the need we stand in of divine grace, and our obligations to exercise candour, charity and tenderness towards our fellow-Christians, are instructions which would infallibly arise out of the due discharge of this duty. And then, on the other hand, being so happy as to discover, in the main, our own sincerity and uprightness, how should we feel that *rejoicing* of which the apostle speaks *a*, springing from the 'testimony of our consciences, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world!' The like advantages would also result from the making it our practice, at certain stated seasons, to reflect on our past general behaviour; not to say how the inuring ourselves to these exercises would, in time, contribute greatly to the rendering them easy, and in a sort habitual. *I thought on my ways*, says David, *and turned my feet to thy testimonies b*. And his complaint—*Who can un-*

a 2 Cor. i. 12. *b* Psal. cxix. 55.

derstand his errors a? shews as well his solicitous concern to detect them, as his sense of the extreme difficulty of the duty. —Self-knowledge, then, is an important means of growth in grace. As is also,

3. *A diligent observation of the ways of providence.* There is a providence that governs the world in general: and however mysterious some of its proceedings may be, yet such events of a public kind frequently take place, as clearly demonstrate the wisdom, justice and goodness of him, who presides over the universe, and doth all things according to the counsel of his own will. The divine influence in these events is, I know, little regarded by the generality of mankind, and so they lose the benefit of such reflections. But were we accustomed, as Christians, religiously to observe that influence, many striking occasions would offer for the exercise of confidence in God, reverence of his perfections, and submission to his will. And how mightily all this would contribute to growth in grace I need not say.

But what I have here chiefly in view, is a regard to Providence *in our own personal affairs.* We believe that there is not a hair of our head but is numbered, and that not a sparrow falls to the ground without the knowledge and permission of our heavenly Father. Now, if in every occurrence, especially those of a remarkable and interesting nature, we were steadily to eye the hand of God, sure I am the eye would quickly affect the heart, and that in a very lively and sensible manner. Suppose, for instance, *some grievous disappointment* to happen to us, what, in this case, would be the effect? Why, an immediate fixed persuasion that it is of God, would put us directly upon enquiring into the causes or motives of his conduct towards us. And, having discovered something amiss in our temper or life, which this affliction was designed to correct, we should be induced not only to submit patiently to the affliction itself, but to humble ourselves for the sin that had occasioned it, and henceforth to abstain from it. Thus curses would become blessings, and what would otherwise be poison to our perverse and obstinate spirits, would prove the most salutary medicine for the recovery and confirmation of our health.

a Psal. xix. 12.

And on the other hand, it is obvious at first view that a diligent and accurate observation of the influence of providence in *our successes*, would greatly tend to sweeten the enjoyments of life, and at the same time prevent the undue effects of prosperity, by raising our affections to God, confirming our faith in his power and goodness, and disposing us to gratitude and obedience. And thus would the habit of religion in the heart be mightily strengthened, cherished and improved. The utility of this practice, David sensibly felt, as appears from innumerable reflections of this sort which occur in the book of Psalms. And it was doubtless by an attention to these rules, that the great apostle learned, in whatever state he was, how to demean himself. I will add,

4. That *the realizing the great events of death and eternity*, will have a mighty effect, with the blessing of God, to promote the life and spirit of religion. Death is the common lot of all mankind. We have none of us the shadow of a reason to expect an exemption from it; nor do we know when the event will take place. Be the time however when it may, we are sure the scene will be most solemn: it cannot be beheld even at a distance without commanding an awe upon our spirits. Death is the dissolution of an union, the most dear and intimate in nature; it puts an end to all our present connections and pursuits; leaves the body in a state of inactivity and putrefaction; and hurries the soul into a world, to us as yet unknown, but which we are certain will, at that important instant, pour unutterable bliss or woe upon the separate spirit. Amazing change! To the good man how pleasing!—to the sinner how tremendous!—Nor shall the body remain for ever a prisoner of the grave, 'A day hath God appointed in which he will judge the world:' and on that day, ushered in by a voice louder than that which shook mount Sinai, death and hell shall deliver up their dead, the scattered remains of millions of beings shall be collected, and the immortal spirit again possess the habitation it had forsaken. To the astonished sight of this prodigious multitude, the Son of God shall instantly appear in the clouds of heaven, with a splendour on his countenance far surpassing that of the sun, and attended with myriads of angels in all their glory. Before his dread tribunal every individual shall be summoned; exact scru-

tiny shall be made into their several characters and actions; judgment shall be immediately given: and so, amidst the solemnities of an expiring world, 'the wicked shall go away into everlasting punishment, and the righteous into life eternal *a*.'

Now a believing contemplation of these important events will have a direct and powerful tendency to inspire our breasts with a dread of sin, to moderate our affections to the world, to make us patient of affliction and suffering, and to animate us to the duties of our several stations. How can religion dwindle into a mere form, under the frequent and lively impressions of such great and interesting realities, as death, judgment and eternity! Hence it is these considerations are with such earnestness pressed upon us in Scripture. 'Behold I come,' says Christ himself, 'as a thief.' 'Blessed is he who watcheth, and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame *b*.' 'And what I say unto you, I say unto all, Watch *c*.' 'Be ye also ready, for in such an hour as ye think not, the Son of man cometh *d*.' And, 'seeing ye look for such things,' says the apostle Peter in this context, wherein he had been describing the solemn transactions of the last day, 'be diligent that ye be found of him in peace, without spot and blameless *e*.'

Such then are some of those means of a more general kind, which, if duly regarded, will, with the blessing of God, contribute not a little to our growth in grace. To which I would now add, the more particular and positive duties of religion. And of these, the first I shall recommend is,

1. *A frequent and diligent perusal of the Bible.*

This sacred book is put into our hands, as the inspired writers of it assure us, for our 'reproof, correction and instruction in righteousness; to make us wise unto salvation; to furnish us thoroughly unto all good works *f*;' and 'to build us up, and give us an inheritance among them that are sanctified *g*.' Here we are led into the knowledge of God, ourselves and the way of salvation. Here we have life and immortality brought to light, and the realities of a future world, of which we have just been speaking, presented clearly to the eye of our faith. Here we

a Matt. xxv. 46. *b* Rev. xvi. 15. *c* Mark xiii. 37.
d Matt. xxiv. 44. *e* Ver. 14. *f* 2 Tim. iii. 15—17.
g Acts xx. 52.

are instructed in our duty, urged to it by the noblest motives, and directed where to obtain assistance for the right discharge of it. All necessary truths are here revealed, exceeding great and precious promises are here given us, and the most illustrious and animating examples set before us for our imitation.

Now, as it is by this good word of God which liveth and abideth for ever, that men are begotten to a new and spiritual life; so it is by this word principally, that *that* life is nourished and maintained. 'Desire the sincere milk of the word,' says the apostle Peter, 'that ye may grow thereby, if so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious *a*.' By the streams that flow from this pure fountain, the grace which is of divine implantation is watered and refreshed, and so flourishes and becomes fruitful. Wherefore the frequent and serious use of the Bible is of the last importance. It should be read, meditated upon, treasured up in the heart, and applied to practice. Is there, can there be, a Christian who doth not make conscience of reading the Scriptures? Which of us would carelessly throw aside a letter sent us by a friend we esteem and love, written with his own hand, sealed with his own seal, directed immediately to us, and the contents of which, we were in general persuaded, were highly interesting and important:—which of us, I say, would throw such a letter aside carelessly without reading it? How much less is it to be imagined, that the Christian can treat that living epistle, which the blessed God himself hath vouchsafed to send him, in this light and contemptuous manner? A suspicion of this sort, is, methinks, hardly to be admitted. The matter rather is, that some Christians do through temptation neglect the reading it so regularly, attentively, and seriously, as is their unquestionable duty. And hence it is they reap so little benefit from it.

Would you then *grow in grace?* read the Bible frequently —have stated seasons for reading it—collect your wandering thoughts and passions, while you are reading it—consider well that it is the word of the living God you read, and that by the contents of it you are one day to be tried—read it with a view to profit by it—endeavour to lay it up in your memory—in fine, pray to God to enable you to transcribe it into your life. And

a 1 Pet. ii. 2, 3.

the word thus read, I may be bold to affirm, will do you real good. So it was the Psalmist made this sacred book, imperfect as the canon of Scripture then was, *the man of his counsel*; entertaining himself with it as his *song in the house of his pilgrimage*. How happy for us did we conscientiously imitate his example!

2. *The fellowship of good men* is another means of religion. By this I intend the making them our acquaintance, communing with them in sacred ordinances, and, on particular occasions, conferring intimately with them on the things of God. Much certainly depends on the company we keep. By this one circumstance, it is commonly observed, the tempers and morals of mankind are formed more than by any other besides. We almost insensibly imbibe the spirit, and copy after the example, of those with whom we intimately converse. Hence, it was the complaint of a good man, while he lamented the degeneracy of the world, and the difficulty of finding agreeable persons to associate with, "That he always came out of the company of men less a man than he entered into it *a*." But, degenerate as the world is, there are men of virtue and religion to be met with. And though it is not in the power of such persons to communicate grace, or to stamp the divine image on our hearts, yet, if we are already possessed of the grace of God, as that will dispose us to covet such acquaintance, so we shall be likely to reap very essential advantage from it. Familiarity with men of this character, though we are not always talking of our religious concerns, will have a happy effect to soften our tempers, to promote Christian love, and to induce us to caution and circumspection in our conduct. Having examples of piety, simplicity and goodness continually before us, we shall, by these means, be animated to our duty, and stand reproved when we do amiss. David tells us that 'in the saints, the excellent in the earth, was all his delight *b*.' He felt real pleasure in their friendship, and reaped singular profit from their counsel, and from the pattern they set him.—Communion with them likewise in holy ordinances will be of mighty use to excite our devotion, strengthen our engagements to God, bind us to the interests of religion, and restrain us from sin. Thus we find the

a Ex hominum consortio semper venio minus homo. *b* Psal. xvi. 3.

zeal and love of the primitive Christians were considerably assisted and promoted by their *continuing stedfastly*, as it is expressed, *in fellowship*, and assembling frequently together *a*.

To which I must add, the freely opening our minds to one another, at fit seasons, upon matters of religion. The right management of Christian conversation requires indeed both prudence and resolution;—prudence, since it would be improper to unbosom our hearts to every good man, and at every interview we may have with him;—and resolution, since shyness, if not indifference to religion itself, is too apt to hold us back from the practice of this duty at all. Had we some experienced friend with whom we could be perfectly free, and were we watchful to seize every favourable opportunity that offered for discourse of this sort, we should doubtless find our account in it. The psalmist had his friend with whom he took sweet counsel, and in whose company he was used to go up to the house of the Lord. So was he frequently relieved of many discouraging doubts which perplexed his mind, and of many sad burdens which oppressed his heart. 'As iron sharpeneth iron, so doth the countenance of a man his friend *b*.' And the sympathy, to say no more of it, which arises out of such discourse, prudently managed, hath often an amazing effect to soothe the breast, and invigorate the spirits. An assemblage of fair plants in a garden we shall see flourish and grow in such connection, while perhaps a flower detached from the rest languishes and dies.—From Christian society I go on to mention,

3. *The duties of public worship.*

That God is to be worshipped in a social way, is a plain dictate of reason and conscience, and hath the support and consent of the far greater part of mankind. Go where we will, we see some temple erected for the service of God—some house wherein men agree to meet for the purposes of religion. Nor hath Scripture left us to plan out the forms of these public exercises for ourselves. Prayer and praise, accompanied with suitable instructions from the word of God, are the main branches of social worship. And the assembling ourselves together weekly for such ends is solemnly enjoined upon us. Now this being the case, *the forsaking these assemblies*, as is the manner of some,

a Acts ii. 42. *b* Prov. xxvii. 17.

can never surely be compatible with a growth in grace. Nor is it imaginable that they who do but now and then attend them, at a late hour, in a formal way, and with little concern to profit by what they hear: I say it is hardly imaginable that such persons should make any considerable progress in religion. A practice the reverse of this is what a real concern for the welfare of our souls teaches. 'They who are planted in the house of the Lord shall flourish in the courts of our God:' they 'shall bring forth fruit in old age; they shall be fat and flourishing *a*.' David expresses his ardent 'desire to dwell in the house of the Lord *b*.' And Christ assures his faithful disciples to the end of the world, that 'where two or three are gathered together in his name, he will be in the midst of them *c*.'

Nor must I here forget earnestly to recommend the two positive institutions of baptism and the Lord's supper; which are not only designed to be public expressions of our faith in Christ, and the means of preserving alive the knowledge of his religion in the world, but are evidently adapted to cherish and promote the interests of vital godliness in the hearts of individuals. *Baptism*, which is an initiating ordinance, and by which we declare ourselves the willing disciples of Jesus, lays us under such personal obligations to him, as, when duly reflected on, may be justly supposed to have a powerful influence on our tempers and lives. To this purpose we find the apostle reasoning with the Romans on their solemn engagements in baptism—*How shall we who are dead to sin live any longer therein? Know ye not that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ, were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death; that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life d.* And several other passages we have of the like import. Would we then *grow in grace?* This ordinance should be submitted to as a means to that end, as well as an acknowledgment, in obedience to the divine command, of the grace we have already received.

And as to the *Lord's supper*, whoever considers the peculiar circumstances of tenderness which attended the institution of

a Psal. xcii. 13, 14. *b* Psal. xxvii. 4.
c Matt. xviii. 20. *d* Rom. vi. 2—4.

it, the care taken in Scripture both by precept and example to urge us to a frequent participation of it, and the infinitely important events and doctrines it was designed to bring near to our view, and to impress upon our hearts; will clearly see as well its reasonableness and utility, as its divine and positive authority. On what occasion may we more naturally expect the spiritual presence of Christ, than when he is thus, by the memorials of his death, which he hath himself instituted, *evidently set forth crucified among us?* And when he is in the midst of us by his Spirit, how happy the effect in all that peace, joy and pleasure we feel! and in all that influence which his grace hath upon us, to bind our hearts to God and one another, and to quicken us to duty and obedience! Can *he* then expect to make any progress in religion, who treats this sacred appointment with indifference and neglect?

But it is farther to be observed of the duties of public worship, that their efficacy under God to the great purposes that have been mentioned, depend not a little upon a serious review of them afterwards. Some, it is to be feared, deprive themselves of the benefit which would result from the instructions of one public duty, by hurrying too quickly into another, and so not allowing time for reflection. And what is still worse, others suffer the good impressions made upon their hearts to be quickly erased, by instantly mingling with vain and trifling company. A serious attention therefore to the duties of the family and the closet on the evening of that day especially which is devoted to public worship, I look upon as a very important and indeed necessary means of edification. *Earnest heed should we give to the things we have heard, lest at any time we let them slip a;* and if we duly *consider what is said,* we may hope *God will give us understanding b.* Which leads me,

4. And lastly, To recommend *Prayer* as the most essential and important of all those means of religion which have yet been mentioned.

Prayer is the offering our desires to God in the name of Christ. Now as the desires, the native genuine desires of a truly Christian heart, are the main part of internal religion; so the actually presenting them to God, and that frequently in this duty,

a Heb. ii. 1. b 2 Tim. ii. 7.

hath a manifest tendency to strengthen these springs of action, and to promote the spirit and energy of vital godliness. The divine affections of the soul thus exercised, shoot up, expand, blossom and ripen into fruit. Say, Christians, what grief for sin—what hungering and thirsting after righteousness—what aspirations of heart towards God—what hope in his mercy—and what peace and joy in a sense of his favour, have you not sometimes felt springing up in your breast, whilst pouring out your cries to God? And hath not this happy experience an immediate effect to establish and invigorate all the powers of religion in the soul?

Besides, as the influences of the Spirit are necessary to our growth in grace, and, as by the divine appointment they are to be expected in this way, so from hence the utility and importance of prayer farther appears. God has commanded us not in general only to implore all needful blessings, but in particular *to ask his Spirit*, assuring us that this our request shall be granted *a*. And we are invited to come boldly to the throne of grace, not only to obtain the pardon of our sins, but *to find grace to help in time of need b*. How then can we expect to prosper in religion if we neglect this duty? Indeed if the neglect be habitual, I do not see how we can be supposed to have any religion at all. For as well may a man live without breathing, as be a Christian without praying.—Pray to God therefore, Sirs, not in public only, but in your families and your retirements. Be not contented with having a place of worship to which you may resort weekly in company with others; but in the tents which God has pitched for you, erect an altar to his service. Neither let the devotion of the family suffice you: but make conscience of pouring out your hearts to Heaven morning and evening in private. *Enter into your closet* (they are the words of Christ himself), *and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who seeth in secret, shall reward you openly c*. These are some of the principal means of growth in grace.

a Luke xi. 13. *b* Heb. iv. 16. *c* Matt. vi. 6.

PART II.

HAVING recited the principal means of improvement in religion, I proceed now,

II. To lay down some plain rules for our direction in the use of these means.

I. Be serious in the discharge of religious duties.

It is sad to think how little progress some Christians make in the divine life, who yet very constantly and regularly attend on most positive institutions. To what, you will say, is this owing? I answer, It is owing to the light, careless, trifling manner, in which they are too apt to acquit themselves on these solemn occasions. Is this the unworthy behaviour of any to whom I speak? Let me tell you, Sirs, you have no reason to wonder at it, that you reap so little profit from your duties. If it is enough for you to read your Bible, without understanding the meaning, or entering into the spirit of what you read; if you can be satisfied with a bare appearance from week to week in some Christian assembly, without feeling what you hear there; and if it will suffice you to say a few words to God morning and evening, without either a thought or a wish accompanying them; so far is it from being strange, that you do not improve in religion, that it is vehemently to be suspected you are utter strangers to it. Yet indifference and formality, though not direct hypocrisy, may, I am sensible, overtake a real Christian. Be watchful, therefore, of the first expressions of this great evil, in religious duties.—Dread the thought of dealing deceitfully with God.—Set him before your eyes, when you are entering upon a duty.—Keep him in your view, if possible, all through it—or however let an habitual reverence of that great Being, and of his immediate presence possess your breast. *God is a Spirit, and he will be worshipped in spirit and in truth* a. O! did we thus serve him, we should assuredly find our account in his service; not to say how many sad and painful reflections this serious attention to duty would happily prevent.

2. Consider your duty as your privilege.

The treating it in this manner is of great importance to the utility of it. For as no service can be pleasing to God, which

a John iv. 24.

is rendered through constraint and from slavish principles, so neither can it be agreeable, nor, of consequence, beneficial to ourselves. In the common affairs of life, he usually acquits himself the best in any station, who has a turn for the business of it, and takes pleasure in it. Such a man will do more in a day, and to far better purpose, than another in a whole month. In like manner, cordiality and cheerfulness in matters of religion, are of the last moment to the profitable discharge of duty. The real Christian will indeed, in the general, be well affected to what he knows God hath required of him, there being a principle of grace implanted in his heart. Yet it may so happen, either through melancholy on the one hand, or occasional dissipation of mind on the other, that he may scarcely have any present consideration to prompt him to duty, but the authority which hath enjoined it. And when this is the case, the duty he discharges merely from a principle of conscience, will be in a degree tedious, and so ineffectual to the end proposed.

Be persuaded, therefore, to lay it down with you as an unquestionable truth, that this and the other religious exercise is your duty, not as imposed by an express command only, but as being in its own nature adapted to promote your real good.—Keep it carefully in mind, that the Master you serve, is not hard and severe, but kind and merciful; that he consults not his own glory alone, but your profit.—Think of the pleasures you have formerly enjoyed in devotional exercises.—Think of the substantial benefits you have reaped from them.—And think of the numerous blessings you may still expect to receive through these means. So will you in all likelihood be roused out of your lethargy, be inspired with a cheerful temper, and betake yourself to duty, with a vigour and activity which will at once render it both pleasant and improving. Your *heart* thus *enlarged* by the grace of God, you *will run the way of his commandments* a.

3. Seize the most favourable opportunities that offer for religious duties.

The timing a business well, it is often observed, greatly facilitates the success of it. An observation this, which may with the same truth be applied to our best concerns, as to those of a

a Psal. cxix. 32.

civil nature. Our hearts are not always in a like frame, nor are our temporal affairs always alike conveniently disposed for duty. In general, the fittest seasons for meditation and prayer, are those wherein the mind is most disentangled from the business of the world, and we can, without interruption or the observation of others, retire to converse with God and ourselves. The morning and evening are usually in these respects most favourable. But the hour and exact proportion of time, as persons' circumstances greatly differ, must be left to every one's prudence to direct: nor have we any positive command respecting these matters; though scripture hath not failed to give us some hints concerning them. *Isaac went out to meditate in the field at eventide a.* David says, *My voice shalt thou hear in the morning, in the morning will I direct my prayer to thee and look up b.* And our Saviour on extraordinary occasions spent whole nights in devotion. To Christian prudence also the question must be referred respecting the fit time for family-worship and religious conversation. These matters however, properly conducted, will greatly contribute to the utility of such exercises.

But what I have chiefly in view under this head, is the right improvement of occasional opportunities for duty. By occasional opportunities, I here mean, those seasons wherein our attention is roused by the loud and sudden voice of Providence, or our affections are melted and softened into a frame peculiarly suited to the receiving religious impressions. If these happy moments, which are in Scripture described as *the accepted time* and *the time in which God is to be found*, were eagerly seized and carefully improved, either by reading, meditation or prayer, it is not to be questioned but the Christian would experience a pleasure and profit in them as extraordinary as the occasions of them. His heart thus elevated to God would make him, as it is somewhere expressed, like the chariots of a willing people. And the delightful savour of these devotional exercises would abide upon his spirits many days, not to say what important effects it would produce in his general temper and conduct.

4. Be regular and constant in the discharge of religious duties.

a Gen. xxiv. 63. b Psal. v. 3.

Advice of this sort, in regard of bodily health, is universally approved as salutary and good. Food and exercise are necessary for the support and preservation of life: but neither of them will do us the service for which they were appointed, if they are not properly and seasonably used. In like manner, how little profit can they be supposed to reap from public ordinances or private duties, who attend to them but now and then, and just as fancy or passion prompts them? Nay, I may add, what great mischiefs must needs ensue upon such irregular intermissions of duty! The strength of the renewed mind will quickly be enfeebled, and its vital powers sensibly languish and decline. I know indeed it is often alleged in excuse for these criminal neglects, that the heart is not in a proper frame for the exalted exercises of devotion, and that therefore, they had better be omitted than attempted. But this, to say the best of it, is a very insufficient excuse. For though we ought to be serious and reverent in our approaches to God, yet it is by no means a necessary pre-requisite to duty, that our hearts are extraordinarily elevated to Heaven at our entrance upon it, since to attain such a frame is the end proposed by the duty itself. And if our temper be such as absolutely unfits us for conversing with God, that is our great fault, because it is the effect of some sinful indulgence. And then as to the suspending our obligations to prayer or other religious duties entirely upon supernatural impulses, this is the height of enthusiasm, and when used as an excuse for any neglects on our part, is little better than profaneness, since it is making God answerable for our irregularities.

Be regular therefore and constant in duty.—Gather your manna morning and evening.—Go, with Peter and John, up to the temple at the hour of prayer.—Yield not to every trifling excuse: if you do, excuses will increase, and become every day more and more urgent.—Suspect your own heart of treachery, when the want of a suitable frame becomes a temptation with you to neglect stated seasons of devotion.—Turn this device of Satan against himself, by making it a reason with you to implore earnestly divine grace to dispose you to duty.—And while you dread formality, take heed how you are driven by the apprehension of this evil into the opposite extreme of irreligion and profaneness. He who makes a point of regularly attending

upon divine institutions, and that with a view to his real profit, though he may not always enjoy that pleasure he could wish, will yet assuredly find his account in so doing.

5. Rest not in your duties.

What I mean by this is the cautioning you against laying such a stress upon your duties as shall defeat their true intent. And of this we are guilty, when we attend carefully and precisely to the forms of religion, without a due concern to enter into the spirit of them. But of what avail are all the external labours of fasting and prayer, and other the most expensive services, if the heart be not engaged in them? Scripture and reason teach that they are not only unprofitable to ourselves, but an abomination to the Lord. Beware, therefore, of formality, and of that most dangerous species of pride, the valuing yourselves upon your strictness and regularity. This is the fly in the pot of ointment, which spoils its grateful odour. That confidence, likewise, in duty, which, in the least degree, precludes a regard to Christ, and the influences of divine grace, is highly pernicious and sinful. Yet how insensibly such a criminal self-complacency is apt to insinuate itself into our hearts I hardly need tell you. And hence that unfruitfulness, shame, and dejection of spirit, we afterwards so sadly lament.

Be watchful, therefore, Christians, against this temper.—Let Christ be the grand medium of all your intercourses with heaven.—Fix your eyes steadily upon him, and expect to be accepted of God alone through him.—Rely on his Spirit for that assistance you need, and give him the glory of it.—Put your duties into the hands of the *Angel of the covenant*, to be perfumed with the incense of his merit.—And *having done all*, acknowledge yourselves *unprofitable servants*. O were this our temper, what pleasure might we not enjoy in duty, and what substantial fruits might we not reap from it! I have only to add once more,

6. And lastly, Let there be an agreement between your profession and practice.

It is not possible that a man who makes conscience of the duties I have been recommending should lead an immoral life. To dissuade you therefore from open enormities, after what has been said, may seem needless. I rather mean to exhort you to

such a circumspection, decency, and, if I may so say, dignity of conduct, as is answerable to your religious privileges. A vain, trifling, desultory behaviour from day to day, though it be not, strictly speaking, vicious, is very unbecoming a Christian. Have some object of importance in civil life daily in view. Pursue it with attention. And take care that your hours of relaxation and amusement be so conducted, and held under such restraints, as that they may neither hurt your conscience, nor hinder your usefulness. A good man may not only use the blessings of life, but enjoy them: nay, and it is his duty to be cheerful, as well as serious. The mean, however, between lightness and severity you should carefully observe. And this will at once reflect a lustre on your religious profession in the view of others, and tend greatly to your own edification and comfort.

Having thus directed you to the proper means of improvement in religion, and laid down certain rules to guide you in the use of them, I should now,

III. Attempt, by suitable motives, to excite your most serious regards to the exhortations which have been given. But these motives I shall at present do little more than mention, as they will be occasionally discussed in the following discourses. Now,

1. The first which demands our consideration is the end proposed by the use of these means—our *growth in grace*. An end truly noble and important, and which, if it were rightly understood, as comprehending in it the greatest blessedness, it could not fail of having a powerful effect upon our hearts. And here, in order to fire our zeal, and provoke our emulation, I might describe the character of him who excels in religion. I might tell you what real beauty there appears in his countenance, and in his general deportment—an amiableness which, while it attracts the esteem and affection of his fellow-Christians, demands the respect and reverence of even the wicked themselves. I might tell you what pleasure he feels in his own breast, resulting from a sense of the divine favour, and the exalted hope of eternal life. And I might tell you how great a blessing he is to his friends, to the church of God, and to civil society. If, therefore, you wish to be truly happy, honourable and useful, let it be your concern, above all things, to grow in grace. And then it is to be remembered, as a farther argument to persuade us to diligence,

2. That this object, so highly important, is not to be attained, ordinarily, without the use of means. There is a manifest suitableness in the means, as they have been described, to the end. And we are obliged, by the divine appointment, to the observation of them. *Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling a.* And *give diligence to make your calling and election sure b.* It were, therefore, the height of presumption, however the power and grace of God may be exerted upon extraordinary occasions, to expect he should depart from his usual measures of administration. As well may the husbandman hope to reap a plenteous harvest from land which he hath taken no pains to cultivate, as a Christian to grow in grace, while he lives in the neglect of appointed duties. Nay, such a neglect is so far from being in the least countenanced by the doctrine of divine influences, that it plainly argues the want of a true and lively faith in that doctrine. And then,

3. In the use of these means, so fit in their own nature, and so evidently of God's appointment, we have the greatest encouragement to hope we shall attain the end. If the promise of him who cannot lie is to be credited, there can be no room to hesitate upon this point. Each of the duties that have been recommended is not only urged upon us by divine authority, but hath either directly or indirectly some assurance of success annexed to the due performance of it. Time would fail me, were I to refer you to them all; I shall therefore sum up the whole of what Scripture hath declared upon this matter, in the words of the prophet, *They who wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary, and they shall walk, and not faint c.*

And now to apply what hath been said, let each of us seriously enquire,

1. Whether we have the grace of God? The seeds of religion must be first implanted in the heart, before they can spring up, and bring forth fruit. Have we then a principle of divine faith? If we have, the natural, the genuine, the necessary expressions of it will be such as these—abhorrence of sin, and sorrow for it—veneration for God, and submission to his will—love to Christ, and a concern to please him—and a preference of the

a Phil. ii. 12. b 2 Pet. i. 10. c Isa. xl. 31.

hopes and pleasures of religion, to those of time and sense. There are, I am sensible, degrees of grace. But its nature is the same in all Christians. And they who, through various discouragements, are the most backward to pronounce certainly upon their own state, will nevertheless, if they are sincere, be free to declare, that their practical judgment is fixed on the side of religion, and that their first and principal desire is directed to the great objects it recommends; while others will bear them witness, that the general course of their lives corresponds with their profession. If, then, we have the grace of God, let God have the glory of it. If we have it not, O may a firm persuasion of its importance excite an ardent concern to obtain it! Again,

2. Let us enquire, those of us who are Christians, Whether we *grow in grace?* To determine aright upon this question requires no small judgment, attention and impartiality, since, through various causes, we are prone to pass a false verdict upon ourselves. This mistake we shall be in great danger of making, if either outward prosperity, or spiritual gifts, or the elevation of our passions on certain occasions, are the criterions by which we judge. The prevailing temper of the heart should most certainly be the grand object of enquiry. As, therefore, there are no dispositions more strongly characteristic of a real Christian than humility, self-diffidence, dread of sin, a conscientious regard to duty, indifference to the world, and zeal for the glory of God, the honour of Christ, and the interest of religion; so our improvement in these graces will furnish the most satisfactory answer to this important question. And if we do indeed prosper in religion, we shall be sensible that our prosperity is owing to those divine influences, which have concurred with the means appointed to that end. Let us, therefore, make our humble and cheerful acknowledgments to the Spirit of all grace, be careful to walk worthy of our high calling, still press on towards perfection, and, amidst the many remaining infirmities which daily afflict our hearts, comfort ourselves with an assured hope, *That he who hath begun a good work in us will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ* a.

a Phil. i. 6.

DISCOURSE XII.

IMPROVEMENT IN RELIGION THE FRUIT OF A DIVINE INFLUENCE.

HOSEA XIV. 5.—*I will be as the dew unto Israel.*——

THE great Author of nature hath so framed mankind, and so disposed the affairs of human life, as that, on the one hand, our dependence on him should not at all lessen our obligations to diligence; and that our diligence, on the other, should not preclude our regards to the influence of Divine providence. Were the husbandman to neglect tilling his land, because, not having the weather at his command, he cannot secure a fruitful crop; every one would pronounce his conduct as weak, as it would be unquestionably criminal. For he who doth not sow, will assuredly not reap; unless a miracle intervene, which it were the height of madness to expect. Whereas, he who does his duty, though he cannot be certain of a prosperous event, may upon very reasonable considerations hope for it. So that no inference is to be drawn from the belief of a providence, that is the least unfavourable to industry.

And on the other hand, he acts a part equally foolish and sinful, who builds his future prospects wholly upon his own prudence and labour. For as it is an undoubted truth, that the concurrence of an external influence, which is not under our controul, is absolutely necessary to secure success; so a profane disregard and contempt of that influence, must be highly provoking to God, and may justly occasion a suspension of it. This sometimes happens. And in such case, all a man's toil proves fruitless, and he has the additional distress of having incurred guilt thereby. And though God does not always take advantage of the impiety of men, to withhold from their endeavours the concurrence of his providential influence; yet what they thus obtain, in defiance as it were of his power and goodness, is sure in the end to prove a curse instead of a blessing.

Wherefore let a man be as industrious as he will, if he pays no regard to the providence of God, his conduct is as unreasonable and criminal, as if through a pretended reliance on that providence, he were to abandon himself to sloth and indolence.

These observations may with good reason be applied to the great concerns of religion. In vain do we profess faith in the influence and operations of the blessed Spirit, while we live in the slothful neglect of appointed duties. And on the other hand, it will be to as little purpose, that we industriously apply ourselves to those means of improvement, which were recommended in the former discourse; if at the same time our eye is not directed to the mighty power and grace of God, who alone gives the increase. And it is no small encouragement to the Christian, amidst all the humble and painful labours of duty, that he who hath commanded him *to grow in grace*, hath also assured him, as in the text, that *he will be as the dew unto Israel.*

These words were indeed primarily addressed to the Israelites, that is, to the ten tribes who were separated from Judah and Benjamin in the days of Rehoboam: yet they are not of private interpretation, but may be applied to all in similar circumstances. It will however be of use, for explaining the passage and throwing still farther light on the general argument before us, to take a transient view of the character and circumstances of this people at the time the prophet thus addressed them. They were the people of God in a sense peculiar to themselves and different from other nations; God having taken them under his special government and protection, and been used by extraordinary means to defend and save them. So that the idea of a providence was interwoven with their civil constitution, and a dependence upon it was the first expression of obedience required of them. Wherefore the putting their trust at any time in an arm of flesh, to which they were ever prone, was justly considered as a breach of their allegiance to God their king, and a forfeiture of his favour and protection: not to say how it became the source of every other impiety, and so in the end drew after it very fatal consequences.

In the guilt of this sin, and the miserable effects of it, they were now plunged. The prophet Hosea therefore being sent

to awaken them to repentance, puts them upon making such humble confessions, and forming such new resolutions, as were suited to the kind of guilt they had contracted. *Take with you words, and turn to the Lord. Say unto him, take away all iniquity and receive us graciously, so will we render the calves of our lips. Ashur*, that is, the Assyrians with whom they had sought alliance, *shall not save us; we will not ride upon horses*, that is, trust in warlike preparations; *neither will we say any more to the work of our hands, ye are our Gods: for in thee the fatherless findeth mercy a.* To which acknowledgments he represents the blessed God as immediately replying, *I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely: for mine anger is turned away from him. I will be as the dew unto Israel: he shall grow as the lily, and cast forth his roots as Lebanon.* "Your infidelity, self-confidence and impiety have almost proved your ruin. They have defaced your beauty and glory, and reduced you to a languishing dying state. But I will have mercy on you. That extraordinary providence which formerly interposed in your favour shall again make you prosperous and happy. On you shall the dews of my salvation descend; and so shall this withered plant recover its strength and vigour, and again bring forth fruit to my glory."

And how justly may this reasoning with the Israelites of old, be applied to the church of God under the present dispensation, of which they were an eminent type! That confidence in divine Providence which was required of them, as an expression of their allegiance to Heaven in their civil capacity, was a distant but natural intimation of that faith which is required of us in Christ our King and Saviour, and in the influences of the Holy Spirit, which he hath obtained for us. And as their failure in point of duty, to that extraordinary providence they were under, was the unhappy cause of all their declensions and miseries, so ours, in regard of that confidence we ought to place in the power and grace of God, is the sad source of all the declensions and miseries we at any time feel and lament as Christians. Wherefore, under these circumstances, the like acknowledgments are due from us, both in our individual and collective capacity, as from them. The first step we are to take, is to be deeply hum-

a Ver. 2, 3.

bled for this great error, which is the cause of all our wanderings from God, even confidence in ourselves, and a disregard to the influences of his Spirit. And, thus returning to him by prayer and repentance, we may hope for the same favourable answer they received, *I will heal your backsliding, I will love you freely, for mine anger is turned away. I will be as the dew unto Israel.*

Now by the blessing here promised, we are to understand *the influence of divine grace;*—that secret, invisible, and powerful influence, whereby the word of God, his ordinances, and providences, are made effectual to promote our knowledge, happiness, and purity;—that influence which impresses divine truths upon our minds, raises our hearts and affections to Heaven, cheers and refreshes our fainting spirits, quickens and animates us to duty, forms us into the likeness of God, and makes us meet for the everlasting enjoyment of him in the world above. And the more emphatically to express the divine agency herein, God is pleased to declare, that he will *himself* be as the dew unto Israel. So the psalmist, speaking as is generally thought of our Lord Jesus Christ, says, HE *shall come down like the rain upon the mown grass; as showers that water the earth a.* Now what I propose is only,

I. To illustrate this subject, by shewing you why these divine influences are compared to the dew; and,

II. To make some practical reflections.

I. Why are the influences of divine grace compared to the dew?

The dew is a mist or thin small kind of rain, which falls upon the earth morning and evening, in a very gentle, gradual, imperceptible manner, and so refreshes the ground, and makes it fruitful. In some countries, especially the eastern, it is a great deal more plentiful than with us, and for several months together, supplies the place of rain. It hath been generally esteemed, therefore, a very great blessing, and is often in scripture so represented. Thus, when Isaac blesses his son Jacob, he says, *God give thee of the dew of heaven, and the fatness of the earth, and plenty of corn and wine b.* And when Moses blesses the tribe of Joseph, he says, *Blessed of the Lord be his lands for the*

a Psal. lxxii. 6. b Gen. xxvii. 28.

precious things of heaven, for the dew a. And on the other hand, the withholding it is mentioned as a curse, *Ye mountains of Gilboa, let there be no dew upon you b.*

Now there are three views in which we may consider the *dew* as a just and natural emblem of the *influences of the Spirit.* It is so in regard, first, of its origin; secondly, of the manner in which it falls; and thirdly, of its use.

FIRST, As to its *origin.* The dew comes down from above: whence it is frequently called *The dew of heaven,* and *the heavens* are said *to drop down dew c.* Indeed, strictly speaking, it is a vapour exhaled from the earth and waters. But as this vapour is carried up into the air, and from thence falls upon the ground, it may very well be described as coming from above, and from the heavens. Nor is it the effect of human art and power, but a wise provision of the God of heaven for watering the earth, and making it fruitful. And hence, among other wonders of his power, which the great God mentions in his discourse with Job, he thus challenges him concerning the rain and the dew, *Hath the rain a father? or who hath begotten the drops of the dew d?*

In like manner, the influences of the Spirit are from above, and come down from God. They are the effects, not of human wit or energy, but of divine wisdom, power, and goodness. And they are absolutely at God's disposal, and under his direction and controul. And who shall question this? To deny that there is a secret, invisible, mighty influence, which at some seasons especially quickens the heart of a good man, and animates him to his duty, is in effect to deny all religion. And to ascribe this influence to a man's own will and agency, is not only to contradict the evident testimony of Scripture, but to admit difficulties which are not to be satisfactorily accounted for on any one principle of nature or reason. No man, I think, will dare affirm, that God, who is a Spirit, cannot have access to the spirits which he hath made; or that there is any the least absurdity in supposing, that if he please he can impress the mind with a firm and lively belief of future and invisible things, incline the will to a cheerful compliance with the dictates of his word, soften

a Deut. xxxiii. 13. *b* 2 Sam. i. 21.
c Deut. xxxiii. 28. *d* Job xxxviii. 28.

the hard heart, and so touch the affections as to make them an effectual spring to action.

And that this is the case, may, I think, with great strength of reason, be inferred from a plain matter of fact, of which we are frequently the witnesses. The means of religion are manifestly adapted to produce the effects which have been mentioned, just as the sowing and cultivating the ground to make it fruitful. But these means are not alike successful with all who enjoy them. Here is one shall have the evidence of the gospel set before him in the most convincing light, and shall be reasoned and expostulated with in the most lively and affecting manner; and yet he shall continue as stupidly ignorant, unbelieving, and perverse as ever. While another, who came under the sound of the word, with perhaps as great, if not greater prejudices and disinclinations than he, shall go away deeply affected with his future and everlasting concerns, and with such impressions of divine truths on his heart, as issue in a saving conversion to God. And so with respect to Christians themselves; how cold and languid are some under the means of grace, while others are sensibly refreshed, quickened, and animated by those means! The like may be observed in regard of that darkness and dejection of mind which the best of men on some occasions endure. Here are two, both equally oppressed with fear and melancholy, and both equally desirous to enjoy the sensible comforts and pleasures of religion. They have both recourse to the same means. The one is happily set at liberty from all his fears, while the other goes away with a sorrowful heart, and remains a considerable time longer in this unhappy and afflicted state. How natural the inference! that the benefit which the former reaps from the means of religion, is owing to the kind and seasonable influences of divine grace which accompany them.

But it is not from fact and experience only, that we are led into this conclusion. It is the universal and prevailing doctrine of the Bible. The Bible itself claims our attention as a supernatural revelation, and therefore takes it for granted, as a truth evident to our reason, that God can have, and that he actually hath access to the hearts of men. Whoever reads the Psalms, and the other devotional writings of the Old Testament, will see that the divine influences were the common privilege of all

good men in the earlier ages of the world, and that it was in this way religion was begun and carried on in their hearts. And my time would fail me, were I to cite the most remarkable passages only, which relate to the Spirit of God and his influence, in the New Testament. Nor are we in any danger of ascribing that to God, which is the fruit of a weak and depraved imagination, while we are carefully attentive to the tendency and effect of those impressions that are made on our hearts.

The influences then of which we are here speaking, are of divine original. They descend like the dew from the heavens. They are from above, and come down from the Father of lights, and the God of all consolation. Is your heart, Christian, humbled under a sense of sin? Are you refreshed with the hopes and comforts of the gospel? Are you animated to duty and obedience? And are you made patient of affliction and suffering? Does the word preached profit you? so that, on some occasions especially, you are remarkably cheerful and vigorous in your attendance on holy ordinances, and can say with Peter, inflamed with the love of God, and enlivened with his gracious presence, *It is good to be here.* Are you, in a word, made wiser, happier, and better, by religious duties? It is owing to the grace of God, to these *dews* that descend from the everlasting hills.

SECONDLY, The dew is a natural and fit emblem of the influences of the Spirit, in regard of *the manner in which it falls* upon the earth. This is very remarkable, and doubtless one main reason of the comparison. It descends *gradually—imperceptibly—seasonably*—and sometimes very *plentifully.*

I. It is remarkable of the dew that it falls *gradually.* It comes down, not like the rain in heavy showers, with impetuous violence, carrying every thing before it, but in an easy, soft, and gentle manner. This idea Moses adopts when he says, *My speech shall distil as the dew, and as the small rain upon the tender herb a.* So, the influences of the Spirit are gradual in their communication, and many times very soft and gentle in their operations on the heart. It is by degrees usually that men are converted from sin to God. And you hardly need be told, that in regard of those who are converted, there are degrees

a Deut. xxxii. 2.

of grace. To this purpose we read of children, young men, and fathers, in Christ; of plants and cedars in the church of God; of the weak in faith—the tender and feeble-minded, and those who are strong in faith giving glory to God. And, as thus, improvements in religion are gradual, so are those influences, we may reasonably conclude, by which such improvements are made. It is step by step that God leads on his people, many of them, to farther and nobler attainments in the divine life. Their knowledge, faith, hope, love and joy, receive fresh accession of strength and vigour, from the blessing and influence of Heaven, on means appointed to that end. Their corruptions are gradually weakened and subdued, and, like the Canaanites, are driven out by little and little. They are formed by various exercises into the divine likeness, and by degrees *made meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light.* Numerous passages, were there occasion, I might cite, both to prove and illustrate this.

Like the dew, these influences are also soft and gentle in their operation. Their efficacy is indeed sometimes expressed in striking language, and by bold and lively images. So we read of the *exceeding greatness,* or hyperbole *a, of God's power towards them who believe, according to the working* or the energy *b of his mighty power.* So the prophet speaks of the word of the Lord being *a fire* to melt and *a hammer c* to break the hard heart: and the apostle, of its being *quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of the soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow d.* But here, these influences are represented as gently insinuating themselves into the heart, like the dew into the ground. *The kingdom of God cometh without observation:* and, however some may talk of rapturous joys, ecstatic visions, and violent agitations of the mind, it is, I believe, in this more soft and rational way that Christians are usually inclined, and prompt to that which is good. The grace of God we may consider as mingling itself, and that in a manner, as I shall hereafter shew you, imperceptible to us, with the reasonings, persuasions, and motives of his word, and so making them effectual. And hence we frequently

a Τὸ ὑπερβάλλον. *b* Κατὰ τὴν ἐνέργειαν.—Eph. i. 19.
c Jer. xxiii. 29. *d* Heb. iv. 12.

in Scripture, meet with the soft expressions of inclining, drawing, leading and alluring. Happy they who know what these operations mean—know them I mean by the effects they produce in the mind! Are your hearts, Christians, at any time melted, and your affections moved with the great considerations of religion? And are your wills sweetly inclined to the choice, and cordially determined to the pursuit of spiritual and divine objects? Such is the kindly influence of this dew that comes down from above.

2. It falls in a very insensible and *imperceptible* manner. It is not like the rain which may be seen, or the drops which may be distinguished from each other; but a kind of mist which is hardly to be perceived but by its effects. In like manner the grace of God, or the power which influences the heart, is scarcely to be known or apprehended, but by its effects. It is with, as well as upon the mind that the Holy Spirit operates. There are no new faculties given us, only they are led and directed to their proper objects. And the hand or power that does this is to us invisible, just as it is with the motions of the body; though they are all of them directed by the will, or by some thought that passes in the mind, yet these springs of action are seldom, if ever, perceived or regarded. And hence it is that the influences of the Spirit are so frequently, in Scripture, compared to the wind: the operation of which, however certain the fact is that the wind blows, hath puzzled the ingenuity of the acutest philosophers. So you know our Saviour says, discoursing on this very subject to Nicodemus, *The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth; so is every one that is born of the Spirit a.* And to much the same purpose is what the blind man in the gospel said to the Jews, when he was questioned by them how he came by his sight. How it was he knew not, but this, says he, *I know, that whereas I was blind now I see b.*

Now this being the case, none should object to the truth of this doctrine, the difficulty of fully explaining the manner of it. For as well might a man deny, that there is such a thing as the wind, because he cannot clearly investigate the nature and manner of

a John iii. 8. b John ix. 25.

its operation; or that the soul and body are united, and mutually act upon each other, because he cannot give a satisfactory account to an inquisitive mind how it is. Nor should the serious Christian distress himself with unreasonable fears, that he hath not enjoyed these influences, because he cannot tell how they are exerted, and in what manner they take effect, or because he cannot talk so confidently of Divine impulses, as some vain and presumptuous persons may affect to do. If we possess in any degree the fruits of the Spirit, we may safely attribute them to his agency, though we know not exactly how they were communicated to us. Again,

3. As the dew falls thus gradually and imperceptibly, so likewise most *seasonably*. The wisdom of providence herein is very observable, though the fact may be accounted for upon natural principles. At morning and night it descends upon the earth; and at those seasons of the year, when it is most wanted, and when the ground is in the fittest state to receive it. Were it to fall in the day, (supposing that would consist with the heat of the sun), it would rather injure the earth than refresh it, especially the tender plants and flowers of the garden. And so as to those parts of the world where it falls in the greatest abundance; it is most frequent when there is no rain, and when the fruits of the ground would absolutely perish and die without it.

The like may, with greater admiration and thankfulness, be remarked of the influences of divine grace. These God bestows on whom he will, and at what time he pleases; yet in dispensing them he displays, as well his wisdom and prudence, as his generosity and kindness. With respect to the church in general, Who that reflects on the state of things in the first ages of the gospel, but must be struck with the importance and seasonableness of that extraordinary effusion of the Spirit which distinguished those early times? So were the apostles qualified for the eminent service to which they were called; so were they made superior to all that mighty opposition they met with; and so were their labours crowned with a degree of success that is almost incredible. And if we review the history of the church in later times, we shall see wise and important reasons for those remarkable appearances of the divine influence and grace, with which some ages and countries have been favoured above others.

When the scorching beams of persecution have, to appearance, nearly burnt up the profession of the true religion, these dews have descended in large abundance; so that it hath grown and spread and flourished, amidst the utmost efforts of its enemies to consume and destroy it.

And the like may be observed as to the experience of private Christians. How seasonable those influences which were excited, Sirs, for your conversion to God at first!—a time *that*, when, if God had not thus interposed in your favour, speedy ruin had perhaps been your lot. How seasonable those influences, which refreshed and comforted you in the day of your distress, when your hearts were ready to faint within you, and your thirsty souls panted for divine consolation? How seasonable *the dew of your youth a*, which made you lively and vigorous in the service of God! and those dews which have many times since fallen upon you, under the ministration of the gospel, in your attendance upon holy ordinances, and when you have been exposed to some imminent danger and affliction of an outward kind! In a word, as you cannot but remember, so neither can you help admiring, the wisdom and goodness of God, in watering you with his heavenly graces, when the fair leaves of your profession have begun to wither, the fruit to decay, and the interest of religion to decline and die away in your souls!—So seasonable are these influences! Once more,

4. The great *plenty* and abundance in which the dew falls on the earth, in certain places, and at particular seasons especially, is another circumstance worthy of notice in the parallel we are here running. When Hushai, the friend of David, describes the great numbers he would have led out into the field against the enemy, and the mighty execution they would do, he compares them to the dew: *So shall we light upon him*, says he, *as the dew falleth upon the ground b.* To the same purpose, the psalmist uses this figure, when he would express the multitude of converts, which should flock in to Christ in the days of the gospel: *Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power, in the beauties of holiness from the womb of the morning: thou hast the dew of thy youth c.* The atoms indeed, or parts of which the dew is formed, are very small and imperceptible to the eye;

a Psal. cx. 3. *b* 2 Sam. xvii. 12. *c* Psal. cx. 3.

yet they are very thick, come down in great abundance, and cover all the ground.

So we may observe of the grace of God, there is a rich abundance of it—*A fulness in Christ:* and it is largely dispensed to Christians—*They receive, and grace for grace a.* No supply of art or nature can equal that of the dew. The water the gardener pours upon the plants, can reach but a little way, and is very soon exhausted: but the dew from the heavens, is a continual source of nourishment to the earth, and does that in one morning, which the toil of many weeks and months cannot effect. Thus, how rich, how large, how suitable are the dews of divine grace! Without them all our labour is vain; but with them, as will be presently shewn, we shall grow and bring forth fruit. They are also ever ready to be showered on the Christian in a time of need: for as they are of divine contrivance and appointment, God will not fail to grant them, when they are wanted and sought. The fountain likewise whence they proceed is inexhaustible. Notwithstanding the rich abundance of these influences which have been shed upon the people of God, in every age, and in various parts of the world, there is still the same supply at hand. Like the Israelites, we may go every morning out of the camp, and find this dew upon the ground and manna therein *b. Let us come boldly*, says the apostle, *to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need c.*

Thus, as the dew falls upon the earth *gradually—imperceptibly—seasonably*—and *plentifully*, so do the influences of the Holy Spirit descend upon the Christian.

PART II.

We have seen how properly the dew, in regard of its *origin* and *manner of descent*, is an emblem of the influences of divine grace. And we proceed now,

Thirdly, To consider its *use.*

The dew is sent to refresh the ground and make it fruitful. To this the fields, the trees, the plants, the flowers, owe their verdure, their beauty, their sweetness, and their fruitfulness. All which is with great softness and elegance described in the

a John i. 16. *b* Exod. xvi. 12—15. *c* Heb. iv. 16.

verses that immediately follow the text. Nature we here see dressed in all her glory, and the eye, the smell, the taste, are gratified with the most pleasing sensations. The growth of the lily, the stateliness of the cedar, the beauty of the olive, the verdure of the fir, the revival of the corn, the cheering fruit of the vine, and the aromatic scent of Lebanon, are all attributed to the dew. From which description, applied to the subject before us, we may naturally collect these several effects of the divine influences—*refreshment and comfort—confirmation and establishment—fruitfulness and usefulness—beauty and glory.*

1. Divine *comfort* and *refreshment* is one happy effect of these spiritual and heavenly influences. *He shall revive as the corn*, says the seventh verse, *and his scent shall be as the wine of Lebanon.* The corn, you know, dies ere it lives *a*. It is buried in the ground, and lies there a considerable time, as it were lost and gone. But by the influence of the dew and the sun it revives, shoots out from under the thick clod, and promises a large and fair crop. Hence, the prophet Isaiah, speaking of the last resurrection, when the body shall spring up from the grave, like the corn out of the ground, thus expresseth it, 'Thy dew is as the dew of herbs, and the earth shall cast out the dead *b*.' So, all the vigour and sprightliness that appears in the young plants in spring, all the gaiety and cheerfulness of their clothing, and all the sweet fragrance with which they perfume the air, is the effect of these soft showers. The smell of Lebanon must have been exceeding sweet, as *there* grew the frankincense and aromatics of the most exquisite scent; and the wines that came thence were of the most delicious flavour, and generous influence.

Now, as all this sweetness, savour and refreshment is the produce of the *dew*, so that rich consolation which Christians sometimes enjoy in religious duties, amidst outward afflictions, and in the near views of an eternal world, is the effect of divine influences. The comforts of religion do indeed arise out of considerations, hopes and prospects which are most rational, and justly adapted to inspire the heart with them. Nevertheless they are at the disposal, and under the control of the blessed Spirit, and when they take hold of the heart, so as effectually to

a 1 Cor. xv. 36. *b* Isa. xxvi. 19.

refresh and cheer it, they are to be ascribed to his gracious energy and operation. And O! how reviving are those comforts which spring from a humble confidence that our sins are forgiven, from a well-grounded sense of the favour and love of God, and from a satisfactory hope of everlasting salvation in a future world! If *the king's wrath*, as Solomon observes, *is as the roaring of a lion, his favour is as dew upon the grass a.* How cheering are these soft and gentle rains, after a long and sad season of barrenness! How enlivening these beams of divine light and heat, after a dark and cold night of affliction! *When God giveth quietness, who can make trouble b?* When he speaketh peace, all is joy and gladness within. This makes duties easy, sufferings tolerable, and the common enjoyments of life doubly cheerful and agreeable.

2. *Establishment* and confirmation is another happy effect of the divine influences on the heart. The dew causes Lebanon, that is, the cedars of it, *to cast forth their roots c.* These trees, for which mount Libanus hath ever been famous, are remarkable for their height, strength and durableness. Their roots strike deep into the earth, and spread far around, so that the wind can have but little if any power over them. Thus also the influences of divine grace do not only refresh and cheer the heart of a Christian, and so spread cheerfulness and vigour over his countenance, but they confirm him in the faith and practice of religion. They cause him to take root downwards, as well as to grow upwards. And this surely is a very desirable blessing. *It is a good thing that the heart be established with grace d,* that is, that it be well grounded in the essential truths of religion, and be disposed, upon right principles, to the practice of its several duties.

Scepticism, or a continual habit of doubting, is both unpleasant and hurtful. A man of this character, is ever liable *to be tossed to and fro,* as the apostle expresses it, *with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive e.* And while in this state, the effect of which is usually great confusion of mind, and a disagreeable agitation of the passions, he will neither enjoy himself, nor yet make any considerable proficiency in acceptable obedience. In

a Prov. xix. 12. *b* Job xxxiv. 29. *c* Ver. 5.
d Heb. xiii. 9. *e* Eph. iv. 14.

like manner, he who takes the great truths of religion for granted, but enters not into the spirit of them, though he may escape many of those disagreeable anxieties which are the fruit of scepticism, yet he will be cold and languid in his obedience, and will want sufficient ballast within himself, to keep him steady in a time of temptation and danger. Or however he may, like him in the parable who received the seed in stony places, *hear the word, and quickly with joy receive it; yet, not having root in himself, he will endure but for a while; for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, he will by and by be offended a.*

Now, on the contrary, he whose judgment is fully persuaded of the leading truths of religion, and is confirmed therein by their correspondent influence on his temper, (which is what the apostle John means by the Christian's *having the witness in himself b,*) that man will bid fair to be cheerful, steady and uniform in his profession. Feeling his religion at his heart, as well as being convinced of it upon the sound principles of reason and God's word, he will not easily question its truth. It will neither be in the power of infidelity quickly to laugh him out of it, nor of the threats of persecution hastily to terrify him out of it. Like the cedar, he will stand firm amidst the violent storms of adversity, while others are blown away as stubble before the wind. How very surprising hath been the steadiness, resolution, and perseverance of some Christians! Many instances of this sort history hath recorded, and some our own eyes have beheld. Nor can we help envying the men of this character, that composure of mind they usually enjoy, and that ability and opportunity of doing good which they commonly possess above others.

Now this confirmation in the faith and love of the truth, is one happy effect of those divine influences of which we have been discoursing, for it is by them the Christian is led into the spirit of those great doctrines, wherein his Bible hath instructed him; and from thence he collects this strong collateral proof of their divinity. Again,

3. *Fruitfulness* is another main end for which the influences of divine grace are afforded. It would be to little purpose that the ground were refreshed, and the trees and plants nourish-

a Matt. xiii. 20, 21. b 1 John v. 10.

ed by the falling dew, if they brought not forth their fruit at the proper season. The revival therefore of the corn, is mentioned with a view to the crop it produces in harvest; and the growth of the vine, to the clusters with which the hand of the gatherer is filled in autumn. By the one we are furnished with bread, which is the staff of life, and by the other with wine, which cheers the heart. And *the earth, drinking in* the dew *that cometh oft upon it, bringeth forth herbs meet for them by whom it is dressed a.*

So with respect to the grace of God, he who says in the text, 'I will be as the dew unto Israel,' adds in a verse or two afterwards, 'From me is thy fruit found.' And it is very desirable and useful fruit which the Christian, under the influence of this grace, produces; good fruit—fruit in its season—and much of it, *either thirty, sixty, or an hundred-fold b.* The great principles of religion are not dry, useless speculations: nor is it for trifling purposes that the blessed God is at such expence, by his word, his providence, and his Spirit, to cultivate the barren hearts of men. If there be any worth, any excellence, any utility, in love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance, these, the apostle assures us, are *the fruits of the Spirit c.* And they do exist, not in imagination only, but in reality and truth.

Look among your acquaintance, and here and there you will find a man, in whose temper and life these graces are exemplified —a Christian, who, though he is not free from human frailties, and though he may not enjoy always the same even cheerful frame of mind, yet is conscientious and uniform in his deportment, and aims at pleasing God, and serving his generation. A Christian, of whom, if I were more particularly to describe him, I should say, that he is serious and regular in his religious duties, diligent and honest in his civil concerns, sincere and faithful in his friendships—that he is temperate in the use of worldly enjoyments, contented in the station Providence hath assigned him, and patient under the trials and afflictions of life —that he hath the government of his own spirit, not living in strife and contention, but meekness and love; not apt to be censorious, but candid and charitable; not puffed up with pride and

a Heb. vi. 7. *b* Mark iv. 20. *c* Gal. v. 21.

vanity, but of a humble and condescending temper—that 'he seeks not his own things, but the things of others,' feels the distresses of the afflicted, rejoices in every opportunity of doing good, and, in a word, makes the glory of God, and a conformity to his will, the scope and end of his actions. This is the man on whose heart the refreshing dews of divine grace descend; and such are the fruits, the substantial fruits, which every one who is blessed with these influences, will, in a greater or less degree, produce. Which leads me to speak,

4. And lastly, of that *beauty* and glory which religion, thus flourishing under a superior influence, puts upon the real Christian. How fair is the countenance, how cheerful the aspect which nature assumes, when refreshed with the morning dew, and gladdened with the rising sun? especially in the spring, when the fields, the plants and the flowers, are dressed in their richest clothing; and in autumn, when the corn bows its head to the reapers, and the trees wish to be disburdened of their fruit. There is something amazingly enlivening in these rural prospects; and not only so, but they impress ideas of beauty and greatness on the mind, which are sure to produce answerable affections of admiration and wonder.

In like manner, the presence, the dress, the deportment of a real Christian, I mean his genuine temper and conduct, cannot fail of captivating the attention and esteem of good men, and commanding respect and awe from even the wicked themselves. The grace of God adds a comeliness to the appearance, and stamps a dignity upon the character of a man, that nothing else whatsoever can do. Who can forbear being struck with the native simplicity, the humble boldness, and the unaffected cheerfulness, which sit upon *his* countenance in whose heart the comforts of religion abound? His face shines. His beauty is like the olive tree. His smell as Lebanon. The fragrance of his graces is *like the precious ointment upon the head of Aaron, that ran down his beard*, and mingled with *the skirts of his garments*. It is *like the dew of Hermon*, the dew *that descended upon the mountains of Sion, where the Lord commanded the blessing, even life for evermore* a.

a Psal. cxxxiii. 2, 3.

What ornament so fair and beautiful as that of a meek and quiet spirit—a mind endued with patience and contentment, with benevolence and love? Not all the adorning of broidered hair, of gold, of pearls, of costly array, is to be once mentioned with good works. These outvie them, just as the lilies of the field do Solomon in all his glory. How graceful, in a word, how becoming is their behaviour, who, having been with Jesus and learned of him, aim to walk in his steps and imitate his example! 'Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report, on these they think,' and these they endeavour to practise *a*. And surely, 'if there be any virtue, if there be any praise;' such fruits of Divine grace cannot but reflect real honour upon the Christian, interest him deeply in the affections of those who truly fear God, and fix a conviction of the truth of religion on the consciences of all sober observers.

Thus have we seen how just and natural an emblem the *dew* is of the *influences of the Holy Spirit*, in regard of its *origin*, *the manner in which it falls*, and its *use*. Which leads me, as was proposed,

II. To make some suitable improvement of the whole.

1. Does this dew come down from God? Of him then let us earnestly seek it, and to him let us offer our humble thanks for it. The faith of this doctrine is one principal ground of prayer, and is a mighty incentive to it. For who is there that truly believes in the divine influences, and is thoroughly sensible of their importance to the great purposes of the divine life, but will ardently implore them? especially while he keeps in view that exceeding precious promise of the Bible, that *God will give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him b*. Let us labour therefore as much as possible, to fix a conviction of this great truth on our minds, and to cherish there a sense of the infinite utility and indeed indispensable necessity of it. So let us make our daily and fervent addresses to Heaven, having our eye directed to the mediation of Christ, and to the merit of his death, whereby he hath obtained the Holy Spirit for us. Nor let us forget, having received an answer in any degree to our prayers,

a Phil. iv. 8. *b* Luke xi. 13.

to be truly thankful. It is indeed scarce possible we should; for it is the very nature of the blessing bestowed to enflame the heart with gratitude and praise. And there are no fitter ways of expressing our sense of the high honour and privilege which is thus conferred on us, than by cordially professing our faith in the doctrine itself, and preserving a holy caution in our behaviour that we act not unworthy of it.

2. Though we receive this dew from above, let us not expect it but in the way of duty. If we do, it is not to be wondered at that we are disappointed. Nay so unreasonable a temper as this furnishes too plain a proof, that we have wrong conceptions of the doctrine itself, if indeed we may be said to have any faith at all in it. For how is it possible I should have a genuine confidence in this great truth, while at the same time, by living in the wilful neglect of appointed duties, I dare affront that very authority which hath revealed it in the sacred Scriptures? Men are therefore deceiving themselves, amidst all the zeal they would seem to express for the influence and operation of the Holy Spirit, if this be the unhappy effect it produces. They imagine they believe it, while they really do not frame any proper idea about it, act unworthy of it, and are in effect enemies to it. Much more easily should I apprehend that man to be a real believer in the doctrine of providence, who regularly pursues the duty of his calling, though he talks not much about his faith; than I should give credit to his loud professions of confidence in Divine providence, who all the while lives in indolence and sloth. No. As the right faith of a providence will excite men to diligence in their stations, so will faith in the divine influences excite Christians to the duties of their profession. The ground must be cultivated, and the vine pruned, as well as the dew be expected to water them, and the sun to refresh and cheer them. In like manner, we are to *work out our salvation with fear and trembling*, while *God worketh in us to will and to do after his good pleasure a*: and *to labour for the meat that endureth unto everlasting life*, while we are firmly persuaded that it is *the Son of man* alone who can *give it unto us b*.

3. How vain are all their pretences to a large experience of these dews of Divine grace, who bring forth no suitable fruit in

a Phil. ii. 12, 13. *b* John vi. 27.

their lives! We should deem it an affront to our reason to be told, that this or that tree which is totally fruitless, and hath no appearance of life in it, is nevertheless refreshed by the falling rain and cherished by the enlivening sun. No less an affront do they offer to the understandings of those about them, who would confidently face them down with bold assurances, that they are under a superior influence, and enjoy pleasures which others are strangers to; while at the same time scarce any of the fruits of truth, righteousness and purity, or however of humility, meekness and love, appear in their lives. 'By their fruits,' says our Lord, 'shall ye know them: do men gather grapes of thorns or figs of thistles *a*?' And this shews how little ground there is for that common objection against this doctrine, which is taken from the proneness of many persons to abuse it. For the rule our Lord lays down furnishes sufficient means to prevent any such mistake. Be assured, O vain man, if this be your character, you are under the grossest deception; and the consequence will be most fatal, if your eyes are not opened, nor you in due time brought to repentance. On the other hand,

4. Let the humble serious timorous Christian be comforted —the Christian whose concern it is to bring forth the fruits of the Spirit, though through many discouragements he is sometimes ready to question whether he is the happy subject of divine influence. Is it your aim to mortify every evil passion and corruption, and to cultivate every Christian grace and virtue? to maintain communion with Heaven in the several institutions of religion?—and to fill up the station in which Providence hath placed you, to the glory of God and the good of others? And amidst all, do you readily acknowledge yourself an unprofitable servant, and rely entirely on the divine mercy, through the mediation and righteousness of Christ? I may be bold to affirm from the authority of Scripture, that unerring standard of truth, that you have been watered with these dews from the everlasting hills, and that it is from thence your fruit is found. Yield not to the doubts which Satan, which unbelief, or which timidity of natural constitution may suggest. God had not shewn you the things you have seen, nor enabled you to present to him

a Matt. vii. 16.

the sacrifice of a broken heart, if he had designed to have destroyed you. He is faithful who hath promised—*A bruised reed he will not break, and smoking flax he will not quench, till he send forth judgment to victory a.* Now indeed *you sow in tears*, but you shall quickly *reap in joy.* Now *you go forth and weep, bearing precious seed,* but *you shall doubtless come again rejoicing, bringing your sheaves with you b.* And how unspeakable,

5. And lastly, will be the bliss and glory of the heavenly world, where the effects of these divine influences of which we have been discoursing, shall be enjoyed in their utmost perfection! The paradise of God above is ever fair and green, ever fragrant and fruitful. It is watered with the streams of that 'river clear as crystal, which proceedeth out of the throne of God and the Lamb.' And it flourishes under the soft and healing beams of the sun of righteousness, which ever shines upon it. The climate is healthful and pleasant. The spring abides. The plants none of them languish and die, none of them fade or lose any of their beauty and sweetness. They bring forth their fruits in season—the living fruits of peace, and love, and joy. And God, the inexhaustible fountain of good, is all and in all.

DISCOURSE XIII.

THE USE OF RELIGION IN A TIME OF AFFLICTION.

PSALM XLVI. 10.—*Be still, and know that I am God.*

Of all the lessons a Christian hath to learn none is so difficult, as submission to the will of God under affliction. Not that the duty itself is hard to be explained or understood.—Far from it. What God requires of us in these circumstances is easy to be apprehended: the difficulty lies in the practice of it. And

a Matt. xii. 20. b Psal. cxxvi. 5, 6.

that the difficulty is very great, appears not only from the testimony of the wisest and best men who have been exercised with severe trials, but from the reason of the thing.

A desire of happiness is the first and leading principle in the human breast. It is the hinge upon which our whole frame turns: the pulse of the soul: and the spring of all its actions. It is placed upon the throne of our hearts, to direct and influence our conduct. And it is so deeply rivetted in our nature, that no force whatever can tear it thence. Which being the case, it follows that what thwarts or opposes this desire of happiness, or any way seems to have that tendency, must needs throw the mind into great disorder, and become a trial to its resolution and patience. To abstain from pleasure, to which we are so strongly impelled by this principle, is hard work; but to endure is much harder. Nature starts back at the approach of pain: it shrinks at the very idea of it. And though reason, unassisted by revelation, may attempt to reconcile us to this and the other affliction, by telling us that what cannot be avoided ought to be quietly endured, and that our pains make way for our pleasures, and serve to heighten and refine them; yet reason faulters in her discourse, and for want of sufficient energy to enforce her dictates, often fails in her endeavours to controul the tumultuous passions of the soul. The whole stream of nature therefore being against pain and affliction, it is no wonder that patience, whose business it is to stem the tide, and to allay the storm, should be so difficult to be practised.

But, what farther increases the difficulty of a calm submission to affliction, is the wretched depravity of the human heart. This put into the scale with the natural aversion we feel to pain, preponderates almost every consideration that can be offered to soothe the troubled breast. Pride, passion and unbelief, joining all their force with that principle of happiness I have been speaking of, raise such a tumult in the mind as can hardly be imagined, but by those who have felt it. Patience in these circumstances seems a grace absolutely unattainable: and the cool, faint and abstracted reasoning of a by-stander has little more effect, than the use of oars to a boat tossed about upon boisterous waves, which every moment threaten its destruction.

Now, it will be acknowledged, these things considered, that to behave with meekness, composure and firmness of mind under grievous and pressing afflictions, is a task too arduous to be performed without superior assistance. The great utility therefore of religion at these times, is a subject well deserving our particular consideration. Religion steps in to the aid of the Christian when all other supports fail. And what gives it the advantage above the reasonings of mere nature, is that it comes clothed with divine authority. Its voice is the voice of God; the all-commanding voice of him who hath the passions of the heart, as well as the waves of the sea, at his direction and under his controul—*Be still and know that I am God.* There is a majesty in this language that is inimitable. It is like that of our Saviour, when in a storm with his disciples, he rebuked the wind, and said unto the sea, *Peace, be still;* and the wind instantly ceased, and there was a great calm *a*. And that it hath had the like effect on the minds of many in the depths of affliction, hath been sufficiently attested by Scripture and by the best of men in every age. In order therefore to set the use and importance of religion at such a time in their proper light, let us consider,

I. Our duty as it is here represented—*Be still.*

II. Our obligations to such a temper and conduct—*I am God.* And,

III. The regard which religion teaches, and divine grace enables us to pay to these considerations—*Know* that I am God.

I. I am to explain the duty of the afflicted Christian as it is here represented—*Be still.*

It is a figurative kind of expression; and supposes some extraordinary disorder or commotion of the mind and spirits, occasioned by the losses, disappointments, and troubles of the present life, especially when they come suddenly upon us, and we are unprepared to meet them. The mind is hereby wrought into a violent agitation, just like the sea when a tempest arises. Innumerable uneasy thoughts, painful sensations, and ruffled passions, perplex and distress the heart, spread a gloom over the countenance, disturb our usual peace and serenity, and unfit us both for action and enjoyment. They who have endured

a Mark iv. 39.

affliction in any great degree, from whatever quarter it may have arisen, know well what this means. And by putting ourselves in the situation of persons overwhelmed with this or that particular trouble, we may easily imagine, though not perhaps in so feeling a manner as they, what this state of the mind must be.

It was a distressed condition the good old patriarch Jacob was in, when the sad tidings were brought him, that his beloved son Joseph was torn to pieces by wild beasts. The tenderest passions of his breast were sensibly touched. *He rent his clothes, put sackcloth on his loins, and refused to be comforted, saying, I will go down into the grave unto my son mourning a.* And, apprehending afterwards the loss of Benjamin also, he cries out under this complicated pressure of grief, *All these things are against me b.*—The affliction of Job, that great and good man, was as uncommon as was the patience with which he endured it. And no doubt he felt this violent agitation of the passions, of which I am speaking, though by the grace of God he did not lose the command of them, even when the storm was at its height. One sad story followed another, till he found himself bereft of almost every outward enjoyment. Fire, and sword, and tempest, spread desolation all around him. His body was afflicted with the most loathsome and painful disease. And, to complete the scene, his friends, instead of being his comforters, became his accusers. His own words best describe the tumult of his passions, though his passions, as I said before, did not prevail to his destruction. *O that my grief were thoroughly weighed, and my calamity laid in the balances together! For now it would be heavier than the sand of the sea: therefore my words are swallowed up. For the arrows of the Almighty are within me, the poison whereof drinketh up my spirit: the terrors of God do set themselves in array against me c. Have pity upon me, have pity upon me, O ye my friends, for the hand of God hath touched me d.*—The prophet Jeremiah was a man of a compassionate as well as a pious heart. And how great must have been the distress he felt, while his eyes beheld Jerusalem laid waste by the most tremendous judgments, and his countrymen led away, under the frowns of Heaven, into a sad

a Gen. xxxvii. 34, 35. b Chap. xlii. 36.
c Job vi. 2—4. d Chap. xix. 21.

and long captivity! The grief, perturbation and anguish of his breast are pathetically expressed, in the Lamentations he penned on that mournful occasion. *I am the man that hath seen affliction, by the rod of his wrath a.—Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? Behold, and see, if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow, which is done unto me, wherewith the Lord hath afflicted me, in the day of his fierce anger b.*—It is a peculiarly tender and affecting scene which the evangelists exhibit to our view, when they relate the circumstances of our Saviour's last conversation with his disciples, the night before he suffered. With what grief must their hearts have been overwhelmed at the sad tidings, that he was now to take his leave of them, that death awaited him in its most horrible form, and, which was worst of all, that one of them would treacherously betray him, and the rest ungenerously forsake him? Their countenances expressed the inward pangs they felt, while each one with eagerness put the question, *Lord, is it I?* And yet their sorrows were trifling in comparison with their Master's, who now saw himself just plunging into the depths of affliction and suffering. 'I have a baptism,' said he, 'to be baptized with, and how am I straitened till it be accomplished *c*!'

Now, the pain which the heart feels when exercised with such trials as these, must be very pungent. Nor can any figure better represent the confusion and agitation of the mind on these sad occasions, than that of a storm or tempest which the text supposes. The psalmist adopts this metaphor, when he would describe the tumult of his passions on a similar occasion: 'Deep calleth unto deep, at the noise of thy water-spouts: all thy waves and thy billows are gone over me *d*.' And the prophet Isaiah addresses the church in much the same language: 'O thou afflicted, tossed with tempest, and not comforted *e*.' But is immoderate grief to be indulged? Are we to abandon ourselves to sorrow, as if our case were desperate? No surely. *Be still* is the voice of God; and the mighty power accompanying that word hath, in many instances, subdued the storm, when all other means have seemed ineffectual.

To be still conveys an idea of the lowest degree of patience

a Lam. iii. 1. *b* Chap. i. 12. *c* Luke xii. 50.
d Psal. xlii. 7. *e* Isa. liv. 11.

and submission. Wherefore, the condescension and goodness of God in addressing us after this manner is very admirable and affecting indeed. He does not say, "Glory in tribulation, magnify aloud the wisdom and justice of my proceedings;" (all which he might require of us, and we ought to aim at,) but, "Be still, be silent, hold your peace;" thus kindly intimating the sense he hath of our frailty and weakness, and his tender pity and compassion towards us amidst our sorrows. *As a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him. He knoweth our frame: he remembereth that we are dust* a. *I will not*, says he, *contend for ever, neither will I be always wroth; for the spirit shall fail before me, and the souls which I have made* b. If therefore, we cannot prevail on ourselves to sing of judgment, he will yet be pleased with our silence. *To be still* then seems chiefly to intend,

1. A negative kind of submission; I mean the restraints we ought to lay upon our angry and tumultuous passions. This is the first thing to be attempted, and which may be done when perhaps we can proceed no farther. The violent and sudden agitation of the mind under very pressing afflictions, hath hurried some persons into rash censures on the divine conduct, and an injurious treatment of themselves and others.

Curse God and die c, said she who ought to have borne a part with Job in his affliction, and to have used her endeavours to reconcile him to the will of Providence. "Have nothing more to do with God. He is not thy friend, but thine enemy. He does not deal kindly, but cruelly with thee. Throw off thine allegiance to him, and renounce all thy former regards for him." *To curse God* in so many words, is indeed an outrage upon Deity, of which the most profane are seldom guilty. But the secret thoughts of their hearts, when they are in adversity, if they do indeed at all think of God, are very dishonourable to him; and they sometimes proceed so far as to express them with their lips. Nay, the good man himself, if he carefully watches his heart on these occasions, will find unbelief, pride and passion, ere he is aware, kindling into a flame, and upon the point of bursting out in some hasty and impetuous word against God. *To be still* then is to suppress all such

a Psal. ciii. 13, 14. b Isa. lvii. 16. c Job ii. 9.

murmuring thoughts and indecent reflections at their first rising, to keep a guard at every avenue of the soul, and to prevent, if possible, the least sally of a disobedient and undutiful spirit. And this perhaps is the utmost the Christian can do, especially at the first assault of some unexpected trouble, and when his mind is in a great ferment and confusion. What force is he obliged to put upon himself! And what distress does he endure for fear a word should escape from his lips that may dishonour God, or give the enemy occasion to reproach religion! Aaron, no doubt, felt the workings of natural affection in a very great degree, when the judgments of God were executed in so tremendous a manner upon two of his sons, Nadab and Abihu; yet at the reasoning of Moses, *he held his peace a.*

Undue resentments also against those who have been the more immediate causes of our affliction, and indeed an unsuitable carriage towards all around us, are to be carefully avoided. A man of a hasty temper is no sooner affronted or injured, but he instantly catches fire. There is a general tumult within, and the effect appears in his countenance, his words, and his actions. But religion says, *Be still.* We cannot indeed avoid feeling. Nor is it criminal to express our feelings, or, in a proper manner to remonstrate against the abuses we receive. But the danger is, lest our passions get the better of our reason, and anger degenerate into malice. A watch therefore, a strict watch, must be kept over the furious and the malevolent affections of the soul. *Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves*, says the apostle, *but rather give place unto wrath b.* Such was the behaviour of David, on occasion of that very provoking affront he received from Shimei. He would not allow his servants to revenge it, though they had it in their power, and a fair opportunity offered *c.*—Our tempers require also, at such seasons, very particular management, in regard of our connections in general. Affliction is mighty apt to affect men's natural dispositions, and to put them out of humour with all around them. *To be still* therefore, is to avoid quarrelling with our friends, through a hasty misapprehension of their words and actions; or, if they do behave with shyness and coolness towards us, to endeavour at least to bear it patiently; and, instead of carrying moroseness

a Lev. x. 3. *b* Rom. xii. 19. *c* 2 Sam. xvi. 10.

and severity with us into our worldly concerns, to demean ourselves with mildness and gentleness towards all men. In his haste the psalmist said, *All men are liars a;* but he was quickly sensible that *this was his infirmity.*

So farther, *to be still,* is to hold a restraint upon our passions, that we offer no injury to ourselves, to our reason, our health, or our usefulness. The language of religion on these occasions, is like that of the apostle to the Philippian jailor, *Do thyself no harm b.* Great liberties of this sort some have taken, abandoning themselves to grief, and absolutely refusing to be comforted. And it must be acknowledged, that there is a strange disposition in the mind, at such seasons, to torment itself. It takes a kind of pleasure in gloomy thoughts, in an indolent and inactive state, and in an abstinence from the common enjoyments of life. All which has a tendency to consequences very sinful, fatal and dangerous.—This *restraint* then upon the passions, is what the text primarily and chiefly intends. We must not, however, stop here.—

2. *To be still* is to preserve a calm and composed temper of mind under affliction.

This is carrying the matter farther. It is not merely refraining from impatience, anger and resentment, but maintaining inward quietness, serenity and constancy. I do not mean that stoical insensibility which some few may pride themselves in—a stupid, unaffected, undisciplined temper of mind. In such sense surely it can never be intended that we should be still. Afflictions would not be afflictions if they were not felt. It is well observed by a heathen writer, "That the more sensible perception a man hath of the evils he suffers, when yet he is contented to suffer for the sake of virtue, so much the more properly may he be said to be courageous *c.*" And indeed it is difficult to say for what end our passions were given us, if they are to be totally suppressed. They have their use, and very important use too; which the apostle evidently supposes when he exhorts us *not to despise* divine corrections *d,* that is, not to be insensible of them or thoughtless and unconcerned about them. But the *stillness* I mean, is that composure which our

a Psal. cxvi. 11. *b* Acts xvi. 28.
c Androm. Rhod. l. ii. c. 9. *d* Heb. xii. 5.

Saviour recommends when he says, *In patience possess your souls*[a]. And it is happy indeed to have such a possession of ourselves, as to be capable of thinking coolly on the ways of Providence, and of conversing freely with our friends concerning them—to have such a composure as will admit of inward and serious reflection, will enable us to advert to the alleviating circumstances attending our afflictions, and will allow of our discharging the proper duties of life, without hurry and distraction. This serenity of mind some Christians have carried with them through the severest trials, and that without any mixture of unnatural stupidity.

Who can read over the Psalms of David, and hear him arguing on the dispensations of Providence, without admiring his calmness and constancy? The same may be said of Job. He did not lose his reason, his religion, or his hope and confidence in God, though he had lost almost all besides. But it is the character of our Lord Jesus Christ which affords the brightest illustration of this temper. The very night he was betrayed, he ate the passover with his disciples; and he conversed familiarly with them, while he had the king of terrors immediately before his eyes. O happy man who hath gained such a superiority as this over his tempestuous passions! who, while he laments the loss of one enjoyment, can still taste a sweetness in those which remain! who, amidst the relentings of frail nature, hath resolution enough to break through every difficulty, and betake himself to his duty! who, though God seems as if he were about to slay him, can yet converse with God, can think and read and pray, and have a relish for these divine exercises!—But there is,

3. A higher degree of patience and submission than even this required of us; and that is, to justify, approve and commend the Divine proceedings.

A hard lesson this to learn! "What! must I say it is all well when the whole stream of nature is against me? Must I acknowledge my condition to be the fittest for me, when nought but blackness and darkness encompass me on every side? Must I kiss the hand that almost crushes me to nothing, and seems stretched forth to destroy me?" Yes. So you ought to do.

[a] Luke xxi. 19.

And so some good men have done. *The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away*, says Job, *and blessed be the name of the Lord a. Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil b? Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him c.* "Whatever be my condition I will speak honourably of God. Faith tells me, notwithstanding all I suffer, that he is wise, just and good; and my trembling lips shall pronounce him so." *I will praise the Lord*, says David, *as long as I have any being d.* "Though I am stript of all my enjoyments, and have nothing left but my bare existence, no family, no friends, no wealth, no worldly comforts or pleasures whatsoever; yet God shall be magnified. His name shall be exalted as long as I have breath to speak his praise." What a noble, what a divine and heavenly temper of mind is this! Such also was the language of the prophet Habakkuk, whilst he trembled in himself at the gloomy prospect of the calamities which he saw coming upon his native country. *Though the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines, the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat, the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stall: yet will I rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation e.*

Thus to glory in tribulation, may seem at first view too great a refinement in religion. Human nature is frail, and our spirits are so apt to sink under the weight of heavy afflictions, that it is hard to conceive how a man should *sing of judgment*, as Scripture somewhere expresses it. But sure I am, upon the principles of the gospel it is reasonable, and with the aids of divine grace it is practicable. The instances I have mentioned, and many besides recorded in the New Testament, put the fact beyond dispute. Nay, there have been heathens, whose firmness of mind in adversity, and whose sensibility too of the influence of divine Providence therein, are truly astonishing, and may well put some who call themselves Christians to the blush. It was the saying of a philosopher, famous for his morality, and who was himself also a man of affliction, "I will plead for the ways of Providence towards men, for all of them *f*." And an-

a Job i. 21. *b* Chap. ii. 10. *c* Chap. xiii. 15.
d Psal. cxlvi. 2. *e* Hab. iii. 17, 18.
f Ἐγὼ ὑπὲρ πάντων τούτων πρὸς ἀνθρώπους ὑπολογήσομαι.—EPICTETUS.

other represents it as the temper of his wise man, "not only to submit to God, but to approve of his conduct: to acquiesce, not from mere necessity, but choice *a*." Shall he then, who enjoys the clear light of divine revelation, who hath drank into the spirit of the gospel, and is encouraged to seek and expect divine influences, hesitate one moment at that which the heathen pretends to, purely on the principles of nature and reason?—But I forbear at present to enter into our obligations to this temper: my object hitherto has been only to describe the temper itself.

You see then what it is, in the language of the text, *to be still*. It is to lay a restraint upon our tumultuous passions—to be calm and composed—yea, if possible, to justify, approve, and commend the divine proceedings.

PART II.

THE temper and behaviour required of us in a time of affliction have been explained—*Be still*. Whence we proceed,

II. To consider our obligations to the practice of these great and difficult duties.

Now these obligations, which are numerous and powerful, are all comprehended in this short but striking expression—I AM GOD. Language truly majestic, and, at the same time, most condescending and gracious—happily adapted to convey instruction, conviction, and comfort, to the heart of a good man, when in the deepest distress. "Know, as if he had said, that there is a God—that he governs the world—that I who have a right to govern it, who am every way qualified to govern it, and who have the tenderest affection for thee in thy affliction, am that God—and that all I do is in reference to some future design, wherein I will be exalted." Let us briefly contemplate each of these particulars.

FIRST, There is a God.

To set about proving so plain and obvious a truth as this, and which none among us deny, would be needless and impertinent. That is not therefore what I intend, but only to hold up this grand fundamental principle of religion, to the view of the afflicted Christian. Amidst a crowd of sensible objects, we are

a Non pareo Deo, sed assentior: ex animo illum, non quia necesse est, sequor. SENECA, Epist. 96.

mighty apt to lose sight of him whose nature is spiritual, and who is only to be apprehended by the eye of faith. And there is no time in which the imagination, thoughts, and passions, are more powerfully assaulted by such objects, than when we are in affliction. Prosperity and adversity operate in this respect alike. Sudden and extraordinary troubles, by engrossing our attention, have the same effect to shut out God from the heart, as great and unexpected successes. To remind you, therefore, on these occasions, that *there is a God*, is by no means unseasonable.

Be persuaded then to set God before you, Christian, in all his adorable perfections. Apprehend him present—immediately present with you, closely watching and accurately observing all your thoughts, reasonings, dispositions, and affections. He not only *considers your trouble*, but, as the psalmist expresses it, *he knows your soul in adversities a*—with the utmost exactness and precision he eyes the various secret and complicated operations of your breast. The recollection, therefore, of this great and important truth, especially if it make a deep impression on the heart, will have a prodigious effect to check and restrain your tumultuous passions. Was the blessed God to assume a visible form, and so reveal himself to your senses, I ask, Would not the lustre of his presence command an awe upon your spirits? And would not those striking words, I AM GOD, pronounced immediately by his lips, oblige you at once to be still? How loud and clamorous soever the discourse between Job and his friends might be, when God steps in, when he makes one of the company, and darts the splendours of his infinite Majesty upon them, they are instantly struck dumb: and when the afflicted patriarch recovers from his surprise, with what humility, meekness, and submission, does he address the great God! 'I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes *b*.' But, though you have no such sensible manifestation of the divine glory, God as really exists, and is as intimately acquainted with your temper and behaviour, as if that were truly the fact. Solomon cautions us not to speak a hasty word *before the angel c*: how much less should we be guilty of such pre-

a Psal. xxxi. 7. *b* Job xlii. 5, 6. *c* Eccl. v. 6.

sumption, did we apprehend ourselves, as we actually are, in the immediate presence of Almighty God himself!

SECONDLY, That God who is thus a witness of what passes in our breasts, is the great Governor of the world, and hath a concern in bringing about those events which occasion all this tumult of our passions. *I am God*, that is, in other words, "It is I who have done it." *Shall there be evil in a city*, says the prophet, *and the Lord hath not done it a?*

The belief of a Providence that over-rules all the motions of the material, and all the actions of the intellectual world, seems as reasonable as the belief of a God. What parent will desert his offspring? How then can it be supposed, that he who implanted this principle in our nature, (this στοργὴ) should himself cast off all concern for the world, which is the offspring of his infinite wisdom, power, and goodness? Besides, it would not have been worth his while to have created the world, if, when he had so done, he had left it to govern itself, of which it is utterly incapable, and the consequence of which would have been the utmost confusion and misery. Nor is his self-sufficiency a bar against a providence, for if this were a reason why he should not govern, it would be a reason why he should not create. And then his omnipotence, his omnipresence, and all his other attributes, are strong arguments in favour of a providence, for these render him infinitely capable of ruling the world, and if he were not to rule it, they could not be displayed in the manner they are to the view of his creatures. It follows, therefore, from the belief of a God, that there is a providence, and, with equal reason, that this providence must extend to the minutest affairs. There is no matter too inconsiderable for the notice and attention of the great God, nor does it appear how the whole could be directed to a particular end, without a regard to each part. And surely the concerns of man, since he is placed at the head of the world, must be the object of the special regard of Providence. The divine influence, therefore, in human affairs, is capable of proof upon the principles of nature and reason.—— And how very decisive the sentence of Scripture is upon this matter, I hardly need tell you. *Are not two sparrows*, says our Saviour, *sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not*

a Amos iii. 6.

fall on the ground without your Father.—The very hairs of your head are all numbered a. *Affliction* then, which is every where represented as the means of promoting the Christian's real good, *comes not forth of the dust, neither does trouble spring out of the ground b.*

"Be still therefore, says the great Ruler of the world, for *I am God.* It is I that do it. It is I that deprive you of your substance, your friends, your children, your health, or your other enjoyments, the loss of which you so bitterly lament." We are apt to look wholly at second causes, and to say, "If this or that measure had been taken, I had escaped this great evil: or, If this or the other assistance had been obtained, my child, my brother or my friend had not died." So a torrent of trouble arises in the breast, rushes furiously through every avenue of the soul, and spreads confusion and desolation before it. But the reflection, That the hand of God is in it, would, in a good degree, controul, if not entirely subdue the impetuous current.

It is scarce possible, indeed, that a thoughtful man should quite overlook the immediate causes of his affliction. Nay, a recollection of them, so far as it may be of use to detect the errors of his judgment or heart, and so to regulate his future temper and conduct, is fit and prudent. But otherwise, to what purpose is it incessantly to wander through the wild maze of causes and effects, when the event hath taken place, and cannot, by all the reasoning in the world, be superseded? This, however, is an evil to which we are exceedingly prone. And it is a very great evil, not only because it tends to heighten and aggravate our distresses, but because it precludes those reflections on the influence of divine Providence, which would have a moral and religious, as well as a most salutary and healing effect. Of what consequence is it therefore, that we attentively eye the hand of God in our afflictions? This one consideration, that it is he hath done it, duly impressed on our hearts, would go a good way towards appeasing the angry passions of our breasts, and silencing the hasty and clamorous censures we are apt to throw out upon the instruments of our troubles. The mind, duly occupied with such thoughts and reflections, would be diverted from those objects which are apt to irritate and en-

a Matt. x. 29, 30. b Job v. 6.

flame. And then the idea of God, as the grand agent, would soften an ingenuous heart into submission. I mean such a heart as sincerely and affectionately loves that great and good Being. Nay, it would alleviate the affliction itself, and render it less pungent and agonizing. This was the ground of David's reasoning, when he preferred the pestilence to the sword. He considered the former judgment as proceeding more immediately from God: and it was less distressing to him to think of falling into his hands, than into the hands of men *a*. So our Saviour composes himself to his approaching sufferings, by this very consideration of the divine influence in them. *The cup which my Father hath given me shall I not drink it b?*—Affliction then comes not by chance, but by the permission, appointment, and influence of Providence; and therefore we ought to be still.

THIRDLY, The God who does it has an unquestionable right to do it. *Know that I am God*—It is the language of a Sovereign. So he speaks to the Israelites, 'See now that I, even I am he, and there is no God with me; I kill, and I make alive: I wound, and I heal: neither is there any that can deliver out of my hand *c*.'

To dispute the dominion of God over his creatures, or to prescribe rules to him how he shall act, is a kind of arrogance and folly that wants a name for it. He is Lord of the universe, and has the clearest, fullest and most indisputable property in every creature and thing that exists; for they all owe their existence to his power and will. Who then shall say that *he* hath not a right to do what he pleases with his own? especially when we reflect, as will hereafter be shewn, that he is most wise, just and good; and so cannot possibly err in any of his proceedings. It would be no injury done to an angel, were he to annihilate him; because angels derive, not only their happiness and glory, but their being from God. And surely, since all the pleasant ingredients poured into our cup are the fruit of his unmerited goodness, he may, without assigning any reason to us, diminish our comforts in what proportion he sees fit. Instead of prohibiting one tree in our earthly paradise, he may interdict them all. And indeed, considering the guilt we stand chargeable with, it is truly a wonder that this is not the case.

a 1 Chron. xxi. 13. *b* John xviii. 11. *c* Deut. xxxii. 39.

The right he has therefore to our substance, our friends, our families, our lives, our all, is a consideration that may well silence the discontented and murmuring passions of our afflicted breasts. Thus Job reasoned, when he found himself on a sudden reduced to poverty, and knew not how to account for the measures Providence was pursuing. 'The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord *a*.' And this he said, falling down on the ground and worshipping; thus humbly and reverently acknowledging the universal dominion of God over his creatures. And it was doubtless with a view to fix this idea upon him and his friends, that God afterwards revealed himself to them in his glory, and gave them so striking a description of his power and greatness. *As long as he had a being* the psalmist resolved *to praise the Lord;* well remembering the force of this argument, that though he was stript of every thing to his very existence, God had done no other than he had an undoubted right to do, and there still remained cause for gratitude and praise *b*.—But while God thus proclaims himself a Sovereign, he would have us consider him,

FOURTHLY, As most just and wise in all his proceedings. "*Know that I am God*—not such a God as are the heathen deities—not such a God as arbitrary princes would be, who often act from mere caprice and humour, and without proposing to themselves any end worthy of their supreme dignity. No; my wisdom is consummate: my justice is unimpeached."

Here let the man of affliction lay his hand upon his breast, and solemnly appeal to his conscience upon the question, whether, what he endures is not what he hath deserved, yea far less than he might have justly apprehended? Dare you indulge a thought that God is severe, because he hath abridged you of an enjoyment, which he himself gave you, which you have forfeited a thousand times, and which he hath not taken away, without leaving you still in the possession of some other comforts? He is not severe. Nor would he have been severe, even though he had deprived you of every thing that can be called good. The very shadow of injustice vanishes at the idea of GOD. The most distant suspicion of harshness or rigour in his proceedings, is absorbed and lost in the contemplation of our

a Job i. 21. *b* Psal. cxlvi. 2.

guilt. 'If thou, Lord, shouldst mark iniquities, who could stand *a*?' Does pride or resentment then rise in your breast? Combat these daring opposers of the great God, with a steady recollection of your ingratitude, unfruitfulness and disobedience. Call to mind the affronts you have offered to the Divine mercy and goodness: so will you tremble at the imagination of an unjust God.—Nor is he to be suspected of unfaithfulness. Has he told you that his providence would always smile on your affairs? that health should ever bloom on your countenance? that peace and happiness should incessantly flourish in your dwelling? or, that your friends, your relations, or your children, should never be snatched from your embraces? No. As he hath not failed of any one of his promises; so neither hath he given you the least ground to expect that, of which in the end he hath deceived your expectations. *Let God be true, but every man a liar b.*

And as thus a contemplation of the justice, so also of the wisdom of God, tends greatly to soothe and calm the tempestuous passions. God is most wise, that is, he orders all things so as to compass some truly good, noble, and important end. A truth this which stands as firm as his existence. Indeed the scheme of Providence is, in our apprehension, very mysterious, nor can it in the nature of things be otherwise, for it consists of so many different parts, and those so curiously framed and laid together, that it is an object by far too considerable to be clearly discerned by a naked eye, especially by an eye so weak and dim as is the human understanding in its present state. When, therefore we apply our imperfect, and often mistaken measures of reasoning, to particular dispensations, it is no wonder we are greatly puzzled to give any tolerable account of them. The more exquisite the embroidery is, the more strange and confused will the wrong side of the work appear. But this difficulty of comprehending the ways of God, instead of inducing a thought the least unfavourable to the divine wisdom, should rather lead us to expect, that the administration of Providence, when it comes to be laid open to the view of angels and men, will appear the more grand and noble.—And now, since this is the case, how plain and natural the inference, That it is your

a Psal. cxxx. 3. *b* Rom. iii. 4.

duty, Christian, to acquiesce patiently in the will of God, though your affliction is very painful and distressing, and you are wholly at a loss to explain its immediate intendment. If he is most wise, it is certain that he hath some end in view worthy of himself; and it is as certain, that he knows how to promote your good by the most unlikely means. Surely he who framed this beautiful world, out of a chaos of darkness and confusion, can easily make the greatest evils of life fruitful of the most desirable blessings. And that such will be the result of the present dispensation, will I hope clearly appear, when you come to consider his goodness in connection with his wisdom, and the ground you have to conclude that you are interested in his favour. Be still then amidst the most threatening storms of adversity, remembering that he who is at the helm, is infinitely wise and skilful, and that the winds and waves are under his controul.—Which leads me to observe, that the most quieting consideration, in a time of affliction, is that which arises,

Fifthly, From the goodness of God, and the covenant-relation which subsists between him and us. "*Know that I am God*—not a cruel, but a merciful God; not your enemy, but your friend."

To conceive of God as cruel, is indeed to conceive of him as unjust, than which nothing is more base and unworthy. Such an idea of the great Governor of the world ill becomes even his bitterest enemies, and those who suffer his resentments in the highest degree. Yet, when he appears in the character of a Judge, and proceeds judicially against us, we may well be terrified, though we know he can do no wrong. A consciousness of guilt falling in with our natural notions of justice, must needs on such an occasion fill our breasts with consternation and horror. But when, on the contrary, he assumes the character of a friend or a parent, and we view his mercy and goodness in close connection, and in perfect harmony with his justice and truth, all cause of slavish fear, and of undue emotion of mind, at once ceases. A friend cannot wilfully injure me. A father cannot delight to destroy me. O! think then, Christian, how infinitely good the blessed God is—how he becomes your God—and what evidence you have that this relation does subsist between him and you.

God is good.—Transporting thought! enough to make the heart of the Christian leap within him, even when surrounded with the blackest scenes of adversity. His nature is good—infinitely good—good beyond description—beyond conception. The softest characters, the brightest images, the most tender and moving language, he has himself adopted, to convey an idea, and after all it is but a faint and imperfect idea, of his goodness. He has the heart of a friend, the affection of a brother, the bowels of a parent. GOD IS LOVE. If to pardon the guilty, to extend mercy to rebels, to make the miserable happy, to pour a profusion of bliss on those who had merited vengeance; if these are instances of goodness, such instances are innumerable. Go where we will, even into the gloomy habitations of the afflicted, as well as the cheerful mansions of the prosperous and happy, we hear a voice proclaiming aloud, *The Lord is good; his mercy endureth for ever a.*

But the question returns: "Though he is thus good, and good to me, and to millions besides, in not punishing us immediately, according to our deserts, yet, upon what principle may I consider him as my friend, and as disposed to do me good in the most essential instance, consistently with justice and truth, and with the measures he seems to be pursuing?" Need I tell you, Christian? The gospel, which you have heard, understood and believed, gives a full and clear answer to this interesting question. He becomes your God, through the mediation of Christ his Son. Amazing love! *Him he spared not, but delivered him* unto death *for your sake*, that *with him* he might *freely give you all things b.* By his obedience and sufferings, justice is appeased, and all obstructions which lay in the way of your reconciliation to God are removed. With him a covenant is publicly, solemnly and most surely ratified, wherein provision is made for your present and your everlasting happiness. Your afflictions are by these means converted into blessings, and rendered salutary and useful. Nay, more than this, the Son of God, by his deep and unparalleled sufferings, is become a sharer with you in your sorrows, is experimentally *touched with the feeling of your infirmities*, and is himself immediately interested in the happy issue of all those fiery trials with which you are exer-

a Psal. cxxxvi. 1. *b* Rom. viii. 32.

cised *a*. What can I say more to magnify the goodness of God? You have here the strongest expression of it. You see it united with truth and justice; and thus pouring the richest blessings upon the most unworthy. And now, amidst these wonders of divine love, methinks you have lost sight of your afflictions, or at least begin to see that they may very well consist with the tender mercies of an infinitely good God.

"But ah! you question whether he is *your* God." Why should you question it, Christian? If you prefer his favour above every other enjoyment, if you look for reconciliation with him in the way he has appointed, and if your grand object is a conformity to his image, be assured he is your God. There can be no objection on his part, as clearly appears from the harmony of the divine attributes in our redemption; wherefore a deliberate and hearty consent on yours, may well put the matter beyond all reasonable dispute. Nor should you infer from your afflictions, that he is not your God; for afflictions may be, and often are, the fruits of his parental tenderness and love. To the doubts, however, which arise from this quarter, oppose the cheerful remembrance of the various blessings you have received at his indulgent hands. Call to mind the many striking expressions of his providential bounty and goodness, and especially the seasonable interpositions of his grace in your favour, to restore your wandering feet from the paths of sin, and to unite your heart and affections to himself. Would he have shewn you your misery? Would he have directed you to a Saviour? Would he have inclined you to devote yourself to his fear and service, if he had designed to destroy you?—Since then, God is infinitely good, and you have ground to hope, that he is your God, ought you not to suppress every murmuring thought, and cheerfully acquiesce in his will?—But there is one idea farther included in the text, and that is,

SIXTHLY, and *lastly*, That all God does is in reference to some future design. This hath been already observed in general, whilst we have been speaking of the wisdom of God. But it deserves our more particular attention, and the rather, as this sentiment is strongly expressed in the last clause of the verse—*I will be exalted among the heathen, I will be exalted in the earth.*

a Heb. ii. 14—18. iv. 15.

To lay open the designs of Providence, in all its various dispensations, would be a vain attempt. We are not equal to the task. Yet, of this we may be assured, that whatever afflictions good men endure, the object the blessed God proposes is their advantage, and in compassing that end the display of his own glory. Now, their afflictions are sometimes made to subserve the purposes of their temporal good. Events, which at their first appearance have threatened the most unfavourable consequences, have yet operated in a manner directly contrary to our views, and, after a while, have brought about those very ends they seemed adapted to defeat. For examples of this sort, I might refer you to the histories of Joseph, David, and others on divine record. Nay, there are few serious persons but must have made many such observations in the course of their experience. And in these instances, how wonderfully have the wisdom, power and goodness of God been illustrated and displayed! Wicked men have been obliged to acknowledge the sovereign dominion of Providence, whilst the hearts of good men have been overwhelmed with gratitude and joy. So is God *exalted among the heathen*, so is he *exalted in the earth*. But, however afflictions may operate under the conduct of Providence, in regard of our outward circumstances, there are ends proposed by them, in a moral and religious view, which, as they are more plain and obvious, so they are far more interesting and important. And here how bright, how cheerful, how animating a scene have I to present to his view who sincerely loves God, be his affliction in itself ever so pungent and affecting! Faith is a most excellent, important and necessary grace. It lies at the foundation of religion. It is the root from whence all the pleasant fruits of acceptable obedience proceed and grow. *Without faith it is impossible to please God a.* And *by faith the just live*, walk and act *b*. Now, affliction is a means of trying the genuineness of our faith, and of improving and strengthening this divine grace. So the apostle Peter tells the afflicted Christians of his time: *Ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations: that the trial of your faith being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ c.*

a Heb. xi. 6. *b* Heb. x. 38. *c* 1 Pet. i. 6, 7.

Many a good man hath for a long while questioned the reality of his faith; that is, whether he hath truly believed to the purposes of his salvation. But some grievous affliction, by putting his faith to the trial, hath in a good measure removed his doubts on that matter. The great objects of religion, amidst all these sad scenes, have struck his mind in so powerful a manner, and his heart and affections have been so sensibly knit and united to God, that he has happily learned, with little or no hesitation, to say in the language of the apostle, *I know whom I have believed* a. Well! and should not so valuable an acquisition as this, the ascertaining and increasing your faith, reconcile you, Christian, to your afflictions; or at least prevent your forming a too hasty judgment of them, as if they could not be salutary in their intendment?—Again, the purifying our hearts, the subduing our pride, and the crucifying our affections to the world, are other ends proposed by afflictive providences. And who is there, of any discernment and seriousness, but will acknowledge that these are objects the most important and desirable? Our corruptions are the sources of all the miseries we endure. The Christian knows it. He feels it. He laments it. Above all things, therefore, he most ardently wishes, not only to have their influence restrained, but their dominion subdued. From the miserable captivity in which he was once held to his lusts, he is indeed now, by the grace of God, delivered. But his evil passions still live, still disturb his peace, and interrupt his joys. If afflictions therefore, though painful to be endured, are the means which God has appointed still farther to weaken and overcome them; it ought, it will be an argument to conciliate the Christian to such measures. *Should we not be in subjection to the Father of spirits*, when he graciously condescends *to chasten us for our profit, that we may be partakers of his holiness* b? To resemble God is the perfection of our nature. Set that man, Christian, before your eyes, whose honour, whose happiness this is, who excels in meekness, humility, temperance, fortitude, charity, contempt of the world, and every other divine and heavenly grace: and then say, Whether it is not worth your while to undergo the discipline of temporal disappointments and troubles, if you may by these means get at the rank he

a 2 Tim. i. 12. b Heb. xii. 9, 10.

holds, and enjoy the refined pleasures he possesses? But it is farther to be remembered,

That there are purposes to be answered by these dispensations in the world to come; the contemplation of which, though we have at present but a very general and imperfect idea of them, may contribute greatly to the pacifying our minds under the frowns of Providence. Our Saviour's words to Peter on another occasion may be applied to the matter before us: *What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter a.* The sufferings of the present life have a reference to, and a connection with, the joys of another: *They work for you,* Christian, *a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory b.* If therefore when you arrive at that world it shall clearly appear, that every tear which fell from your eyes, every sigh which arose from your breast, and every sad complaint which dropped from your lips, was over-ruled for your real good, and became a means of heightening your bliss and glory in that state, If this, I say, shall then clearly appear, as it most certainly will, you will not regret, but with infinite gratitude applaud the various measures which Providence hath taken with you. Think of this—believe it—expect it; and you will *be still.*

PART III.

We have discoursed at large of the several truths included in this short, but comprehensive sentence, I am God; and have shewn how admirably they are adapted to relieve and comfort the real Christian under his afflictions. And it remains, that we now,

III. Consider the regards we are required to pay to these interesting truths. *Know* that I am God.

There is no doubt but God hath access to the heart, and that he can, and sometimes does, by the exertion of a special and effectual influence, calm the ruffled mind amidst a tempest of worldly troubles. It is enough for him to speak the word, *be still,* and the tumultuous passions of the breast, as well as the raging waves of the sea, must, they will subside. To this purpose the prophet describes him as saying, *I create the fruit of the lips; peace, peace to him that is far off, and to him that is*

a John xiii. 7. b 2 Cor. iv. 17, 18.

near: I will heal him a. And, *when he giveth quietness, who can make trouble b?* It is however to be remembered, that God deals with men as reasonable creatures. When he communicates comforts to the afflicted, he does it by impressing upon their hearts a clear and lively conviction of those great truths I have been explaining. So that they who enjoy this divine peace and composure can *give a reason of the hope that is in them.* There is therefore a duty incumbent upon us, in regard of our treatment of these truths. And what is that duty? Why surely—to well weigh and consider them—to believe them, and so to enter into the spirit of them—to endeavour to apply them to ourselves—and to pray earnestly to God, to make them effectual for appeasing and quieting our distressed minds. All which is comprehended in the seasonable and authoritative admonition, *Know* that I am God.

First, It is our duty to well weigh and consider these important truths.

They can have no effect, unless they are perceived and understood. This, therefore, should be our first object. "But, ah! say you, how can I fix my attention to these matters at a time when I am surrounded with gloomy objects, and the powers of thought and reflection are enfeebled, disturbed and broken?" True, the difficulty is very great, and all proper allowance should be made for the sharpness of your affliction, the tenderness of your constitution, and the disorder of your animal spirits. Yet, if reason is not wholly interdicted or suspended, you have surely some command of yourself: you are not totally lost, overwhelmed and undone. Let me remind you then, of certain prudential expedients within your reach, which if you were to make trial of them, would go a good way towards composing your mind to consideration.

Some kinds of trouble involve persons in continual intercourses with the world, and allow them little or no time for reflection or meditation. Such is the unhappiness of those who are overwhelmed with the perplexities of trade and business, and of those whose poverty obliges them to work hard and late. The objects of sense are every moment pressing upon their sight, and what with contriving how to extricate themselves out of their

a Isa. lvii. 18, 19. b Job xxxiv. 29.

difficulties, and endeavouring to carry their schemes to that end into execution, their nature is almost worn out, and their spirits and strength very much exhausted. Now, I am sensible, it must be extremely difficult for such persons to apply their minds to close and fixed consideration. Yet it may be done. It hath been done. Make the experiment, therefore, Christian. Withdraw from the public view. Spend some time alone. Endeavour to shut the world out of your thoughts, and to impose silence on your passions. The advantage which will certainly accrue from such a recess to your bodily health, as well as to the state of your soul, should engage you at least to attempt it. Don't object that you have not time. This business properly managed will fit you for your other business. And the pains you are at to recollect yourself on matters of the highest moment, will enable you the better to endure your worldly disappointments. The very changing the scene would be of considerable service, if there were no other advantages to be expected. Our Lord, amidst the hurries of his public ministry, frequently retired for meditation and prayer; and he did so the very night he was betrayed, and when all the circumstances of his approaching sufferings were immediately before his eyes.

But there are other afflictions, such as, particularly, the sudden loss of relations and friends, which have quite a different effect, especially upon persons of strong feelings, and a tender constitution. When the first paroxysm of their grief is over, we shall see them sink into a languid, melancholy, inactive state. And having the gloomy objects of their sorrow continually before them, we shall find them as indisposed, even in their solitude, to attend to the great truths of religion, as those who are perplexed and hurried with the business of the world. What then is to be done here? It is your duty, Sirs, to rouse yourselves, to put a force upon nature, and to use all the means Providence affords, in order to recruit your animal spirits, and to restore you to a capacity for calm reasoning and reflection. Set about the business of your stations. Endeavour to divert your thoughts from their usual channel. Allow your friends to converse with you. And remember, that *that* melancholy pleasure you are prone to indulge, is ensnaring and sinful.

But, after all, there are few afflictions, however acute and pungent, that will not allow a man some intervals of composure, in which he may apply himself to the duty I am recommending. Such opportunities, therefore, you should eagerly seize, and diligently improve. Be all attention, when you are in this temper, to the reasonings and counsels of your Christian friends, or else withdraw from the world, retire within yourselves, read the Bible, fix your minds to the interesting truths of religion, compare them with each other, and apply them to your own case. *In adversity consider a.*—This then is the first step towards attaining that submission, fortitude, and cheerfulness under affliction, which the text teaches. But the considering divine truths is not sufficient. We must,

SECONDLY, Believe them.

What they are we have already seen. Know *that I am God.*—There is a God. He governs the world. He does all things wisely, justly, and well. He intends our good by every afflictive providence, and hath made effectual provision, through the mediation of Christ, to that end. Now these truths are so clear and obvious, that in common they are no sooner perceived, than they are assented to. But it is not a general idea of them, or the barely admitting them to be true, that will relieve and comfort the Christian under extraordinary trials. No. His attention must be steadily fixed to them. He must fully and firmly credit them. His judgment and conscience must be deeply impressed with their divine authority. But ah! this is no easy matter. Though he may have long since laid them down with himself as unquestionable truths, and though he may even now be so far composed, as to be able to revolve them in his mind, yet his faith hath difficulties to struggle with, which before this were perhaps scarcely imagined.

There is a strange propensity in mankind to infidelity, and a degree of it there is in good men themselves. Whence the apostle exhorts us *to take heed of an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God b.* Now, in a time of affliction, unbelief collects strength from various quarters, and often becomes so formidable as to require the utmost exertion of all the powers of divine faith, and of enlightened reason. Firm as the Chris-

a Eccl. vii. 14. *b* Heb. iii. 12.

tian's confidence is in the existence of God, in his wisdom, faithfulness, and love, in the mediation of Christ, and in his watchful care of every one of his people, how quickly is that confidence shaken, when assaulted by strange, dark, and mysterious events of Providence! "Had things fallen out in this or that way, as he wished and expected, he could easily perceive how God would have been glorified, his own interests promoted, and many other valuable ends answered. But, what shall he think now the reverse is the case?—the plainest maxims of reason and prudence, over-ruled and borne down by an obstinate kind of fatality, nature and Providence in opposition to each other, and the promises of God's word, to his apprehension, flatly contradicted by the most sad and gloomy events." Such appearances, such objections, such reasonings, put him for a while to the stand. Nor does Satan fail, by his suggestions, to afford all the aid he can to the interests of unbelief. Wherefore, amidst this fierce conflict between faith and sense, the Christian finds it no easy matter, like Abraham, *to hope against hope*, and to believe that God may still be for him, though all things seem to be against him. What shall he then in these circumstances do? Let me tell you, Christian, your duty—

Endeavour, to the utmost of your power, to divest yourself of prejudice and passion, and to reflect how apt we are to be deceived and misled by appearances, especially when oppressed and bowed down with affliction. Call up to your view the first great principles of religion, which are clear and self-evident, and labour to fix them upon your heart and conscience. Set those other truths, which are deducible from them, in their fullest and strongest light, and give the several pleas in favour of them, a fair, impartial, and dispassionate hearing. Recollect the impressions they formerly made on your mind, when they struck you with all their native evidence and conviction. Oppose past facts and experiences, to your present apprehensions and feelings. Consider well the testimony of others, who have been as deeply afflicted as yourself. And, above all, cherish in your breast a sacred reverence for the divine authority of Scripture, resolving to admit whatever that teaches, as the clear, plain, and unalterable will of God.—And now, while you thus suffer truth to speak for itself, and listen patiently to what your Bible, your friends,

and your own experience, have to say in favour of it, the clamours of sense and passion will be apt to subside, and your faith to triumph over all the efforts of unbelief. So will you believe, and rejoice in believing. And so will your *affliction, while* you thus *look to the things which are not seen and eternal*, become *light* and *momentary*. But then this supposes what I have farther to recommend, and that is,

THIRDLY, The applying these great truths to ourselves, and to our own immediate circumstances.

The assenting to them as true, will avail little to our comfort, if we have all the while a strong presumption against us, that we are at variance with God. A reflection on the wisdom, power and justice of that great Being, will in this case, serve rather to heighten and aggravate our grief, than subdue and soften it. Nay, an idea of his goodness, however pleasing in itself, will afford us but very partial and insufficient relief. For how natural the reasoning!—"He may be good, and yet I who have been his enemy, miserable."

Here I cannot help observing, of what vast importance it is, that this great question is decided, or however that a man is in fact a real Christian, ere it falls to his lot to enter the gloomy vale of adversity. Afflictions indeed often prove the salutary means, with a divine blessing, of bringing persons to a sense of religion: yet they must, even in that case, be extremely painful in their operation; for what more tremendous than the idea of a God assuming the appearance of an avenging judge? And if, on the other hand, a man is totally insensible to any of these feelings, it must still be very unhappy for him to have no resources of comfort under the frowns of Providence, but such as nature or art supply, and which are quickly exhausted. How infinitely desirable then is true religion! O who would not wish to meet the enemy, if he must enter the lists with adversity, in the character of a Christian, armed with divine faith, rather than in the wretchedly defenceless and desperate state of a man of the world? This latter case is sad beyond description. But to return—

I am now addressing myself to those who truly fear God. And since, at these times, it is no uncommon thing for even a good man to question his interest in the divine favour, or how-

ever, to be at a loss how to apply those considerations I have been recommending to his own case; it is my object here to afford him the best assistance I am able in each of these particulars. And,

1. As to your doubts, Christian, upon the matter of your own personal interest in the favour of God: if these can any way be cleared up, composure and cheerfulness will quickly follow. Now, it is hardly to be expected, that I should combat all your false reasonings and groundless jealousies. That would carry me too far. What I mean is only to throw out a few hints for the guiding your enquiries upon this grand question. And here, besides the general advice of examining well the state of your soul, and of comparing it with the word of God, and of calling to mind your past religious experiences: let me earnestly press you to a diligent observation of your prevailing temper under the present dispensation. *That*, rightly understood, will throw a light upon your real character. But before you proceed, lay it down with you as an unquestionable truth, that no inference is to be drawn from your affliction to the prejudice of your filial relation to God. Do not say, "If God loved me, he would not deal with me after this manner." For it is evident, not only from the clearest principles of reason, but from undoubted facts, that the severest afflictions may be, and often are designed for the good of those who suffer them. Nay, Scripture assures us, that *whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth*; and that, *if we were without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, we should be bastards and not sons* a.

And now ask yourself, what is the temper of your heart towards God under the present exercise? Is it your first grand concern to be assured, that God is not contending with you as an enemy, but as a friend? Do you dread the thought of charging him unjustly, be the event of your affliction what it may? Are you willing to admit that you have deserved all you suffer at his hands, and a great deal more? Would you fain come at the cause of his displeasure, being more solicitous to have your sin forgiven, and your heart made better, than even your affliction itself removed? Like Ephraim, are you *ashamed*

a Heb. xii. 6, 8.

and confounded, because you bear the reproach of your pride and folly *a*? Has your sorrow the same effect on you it had on the Corinthians? Does it *work in you carefulness, clearing yourself, indignation, fear, vehement desire, zeal, revenge b?* In a word, are your afflictions the means, not of making the breach between God and you wider, but of softening your heart, and bringing you nearer to God?—If you can reply to these questions, and others of the like nature, in the affirmative, or if these are the main objects of your concern and attention, you may safely conclude that God is your friend, and that he intends you no real harm by any of his dispensations. And surely some satisfaction on this important point, though it arise not to an assurance of hope, will tend greatly to compose your spirits, and to reconcile you to the will of God.—But there is something farther to be attempted, and that is,

2. The application of those general truths I have been recommending to your own particular case. It is the unhappiness of many good men to fail here. Though they are not without hope in God, yet they are so enfeebled with affliction, that they know not how to reason with themselves in the same manner, and with that expertness and vivacity, they have perhaps often reasoned with others in the like circumstances. Now, if you could have resolution enough to make an effort in this way, the effect would be considerable. Not content therefore with a general persuasion that God is wise, just, faithful and good, see whether you cannot trace out these characters in the present visitation of his Providence. A little pains will possess you of not a few expressions of gentleness and mercy, amidst the most fiery trial, and the remembrance of them will wonderfully assist and enliven your broken spirits. This done, proceed a little farther, and consider with yourself what possibly may be the result of your affliction—that God can and often does bring events to an issue little expected, and by means as improbable—that his wisdom is more than equal to all the difficulties and perplexities you can imagine—and that as he *does not willingly grieve the children of men,* but ever *delights in mercy,* so he will very probably magnify his goodness in your deliverance. Or, however this providence may terminate in regard of your temporal

a Jer. xxxi. 19. *b* 2 Cor. vii. 11.

interests, consider what infinite benefit may, and most certainly will, accrue thence to your nobler part. Here the most pleasing, I may add transporting, prospects will rise to your view, especially when you allow your thoughts to wander beyond the line of time, which is not afar off, into the blissful regions of eternity. And in fine, if, amidst these reflections and reasonings, you are suddenly startled by the painful feelings of nature, or by contradicting and opposing events, consider the great God as immediately present, submissively bow the knee of faith at the foot of his throne, and obstinately resolve to place an implicit confidence in him, be the scene before you ever so dark and inexplicable.—It now remains that I add to the advice already given,

FOURTHLY, That of fervent prayer.

Our obligations, in general, to this duty, are founded in the doctrine of divine influences; a doctrine perfectly consonant with right reason, and which makes up a considerable part of Scripture-revelation. Those to whom I am now addressing myself are fully persuaded of it: I shall not therefore stay here to explain or defend it. Nor need I take pains to convince the afflicted Christian, that Divine assistances are peculiarly requisite in a time of extraordinary trial and difficulty. Your own sad experience of the frailty of human nature, the corruption and perverseness of your heart, and the inconstancy and turbulency of your passions, puts the question with you beyond all dispute. Convinced then of the need you stand in of a superior influence to impress the truths recommended on your heart, and so to render them effectual for appeasing and quieting you under your troubles; and satisfied from the word of God that you have sufficient grounds to hope for that influence; it is most certainly your incumbent duty to pray for it.

While therefore you are assured, that *God is a very present help* to them that fear him *in* time of *trouble a*; that *his grace is sufficient for them b*; that *as their days their strength shall be c*; that *he will give them his Holy Spirit d*; and *will never leave them nor forsake them e*; be persuaded to pour out your heart to him in fervent prayer, keeping in view your own wants,

a Psal. xlvi. 1. *b* 2 Cor. xii. 9. *c* Deut. xxxiii. 25.
d Luke xi. 11. *e* Heb. xiii. 5.

and these his gracious and seasonable promises to the afflicted. *Ask*, says our Saviour, *and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. If ye being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children; how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him a?* And, *since we have an High-priest who is touched with the feeling of our infirmities, let us*, says the apostle, *come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need b.* How mightily enlivening, soothing and encouraging are such assurances as these, from the lips of an infinitely faithful and compassionate God! Revolve them in your mind. Believe them. Plead them with God. And look for the fulfilment of them.

There is a kind of omnipotence in the prayer of faith. *It availeth much*, says the apostle James *c.* It hath stayed the course of the sun. It hath stopped the bottles of heaven. It hath healed the sick. It hath raised the dead. And though we are not now warranted to expect any such preternatural interventions of Providence in our favour; yet the efficacy of prayer, through the mediation of Christ, to draw down even temporal blessings, will upon good grounds gain credit with those who believe their Bible, and are carefully attentive to some facts which have fallen within their own immediate observation. But waving this, it will be sufficient to our present purpose, to remark the great utility of prayer to calm the mind and soothe the passions, wrought into a tempest by disappointment and sorrow. Would you be still? would you be quiet, patient and submissive to the will of Heaven?—Pray. Retire from the world. Lay open your whole soul to God in secret. And thus giving vent to that flood of grief, which hath perhaps for some time been pent up in your breast, you will quickly obtain relief. The expedient hath been tried by many, and been often found effectual. How sweet and cheerful a serenity of mind did Jacob experience, after he had wrestled with the angel, and had *wept and made supplication to him d.* The psalmist, having declared the benefit he reaped from an intercourse with Heaven in this duty, tells us that the godly should hence take

a Luke xi. 9, 11. *b* Heb. iv. 15, 16. *c* Jam. v. 16. πολὺ ἰσχύει.
d Gen. xxxii. 24—30. and Hos. xii. 4.

encouragement to pray, and adds, *surely in the floods of great waters* (perhaps he means this tempest of the passions I have been describing) *they shall not come nigh unto him a.* And however there was no sinful mixture of passion in that extraordinary agitation our Saviour felt in the garden, yet it was by retiring from his disciples, and pouring out *strong cries and tears* unto his Father, that he composed himself to his sufferings *b.* O then be persuaded, Christian, to copy after his example.

Thus have I at large shewn you the regards we are required to pay to the interesting truths contained in this short but comprehensive sentence, I AM GOD. We are to *know*—to well weigh and consider them—to believe them, and so enter into the spirit of them—to endeavour to apply them to ourselves—and to pray earnestly to God to make them effectual for quieting our distressed minds.

And now, let me close what has been said with an address to all those who are under the frowns of Providence, and of whom these duties I have been describing are more immediately required. And,

1. As to such who make light of their afflictions, or, to use the words of Scripture, *despise the chastening of the Lord c.* Allow me, Sirs, to expostulate with you on your great folly and sin. That insensibility which you account your happiness, is not the stillness and composure which the text recommends. Nor is that daring resolution of which you may perhaps boast, of the same nature with the courage of a real Christian—a courage which is the effect of a becoming submission to the will of God, and a firm confidence in his power and goodness. It is indeed wrong to dwell incessantly on our afflictions, and to give an unreasonable indulgence to a wild and gloomy imagination. But will you say it is rational or manly, to be indifferent about events that are interesting and important—to stifle your sorrows by thoughtlessness and inconsideration—or to drown them in vain and unlawful pleasures? From these sources you may indeed derive some little present relief, but that relief you are purchasing at a very dear rate. Such a foolish dissipation of the mind renders you incapable of taking the fit and prudent

a Psal. xxxii. 5, 6. *b* Heb. v. 7, 8. *c* Heb. xii. 5.

measures to extricate you out of your troubles. And it will in the end be followed with a sadness, which will greatly increase and aggravate your distress.

But the consideration chiefly to be regarded is the affront you hereby offer to God. It is *his* hand that is upon you. And think you that he will not resent such a contemptuous treatment of his providence? Who ever contended with him and prospered? Of Ahaz it is said, that *in the time of his distress he trespassed yet more against the Lord:* and a particular mark is set upon him—*This is that king Ahaz a.* God afflicts either in judgment or mercy: and there cannot be a more sad symptom of his judicial displeasure, than the not feeling our afflictions, or the being totally inattentive to the instruction and reproof they are designed to convey. Those are alarming words—— *Ephraim is joined to idols: let him alone b. They would none of my counsel, they despised all my reproof: therefore shall they eat the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices c.—In adversity,* therefore, *consider. Know the rod, and who hath appointed it.* Eye attentively the hand of God. Inquire wherefore it is he contends with you. Be humbled at his feet. Implore the forgiveness of what is amiss. And rest not satisfied without feeling the salutary effect of your affliction, to imbitter sin to you, to wean your hearts from the world, and to raise your affections to heaven.

2. As to those who are apt to faint under the rebukes of Providence—a temper to which Christians are usually more prone than to that just described. With you, my friends, I most tenderly sympathise. *The heart knows its own bitterness;* and all proper allowance is to be made for the hasty and unguarded sallies of pungent grief. To bid you not feel your affliction, would be to heighten and aggravate your distress. And to blame you for pouring out your complaints to those around you, would be cruel and inhuman. Nature will have its course. The tide is not to be instantly turned. Yet your passions, though they are not to be immediately subdued, may be guided into their proper channel, and be assisted to some useful and important purposes. And who knows but the tempest may by and by subside, and a calm ensue?

a 2 Chron. xxviii. 22. b Hos. iv. 17. c Prov. i. 30, 31.

To these ends, let me remind you again, of what I have already particularly discoursed—There is a God—That God governs the world—He has a right to govern it—He is most wise, just and good—The measures he pursues, are all directed to some valuable and important object—He does not willingly afflict the children of men—You are not to conclude from your present feelings that he is your enemy—Others have been deeply afflicted as well as you—Jesus, the Captain of your salvation, was made perfect through sufferings—He knows how to pity you—And *his* sorrows have sufficient efficacy in them to convert *yours* into real blessings. Spend a thought on these things, *O ye that are afflicted, tossed with tempests, and* hitherto *not comforted a.* They are considerations which will, however, hold you up from despair, and prevent your uttering rash censures on the ways of God.—"But, ah! your minds are in such confusion, and you are so perplexed with doubts as to your interest in the divine favour, that you can take little comfort from these considerations." It may be so. Let me, however, intreat you to turn your attention for a while, if that is possible, from your affliction; to think with yourselves how much worse your condition might be, it would have been, if God had treated you according to your deserts; to consider the mercies you still enjoy; to reflect on your past experience of the Divine goodness; to make your Bible your companion in these sad hours of grief and melancholy; to give your Christian friends a patient hearing, while they attempt to comfort you; and above all, to take sanctuary at the throne of grace, and there pour out your tears of sorrow to him who hath an ear to hear, and a heart to pity the afflicted.

3. As to those who are enabled to practise the great duties I have been describing;—how great, my friends, is your mercy! You may well *glory in your infirmities*, as the apostle expresses it, since the power of Christ thus rests upon you. An end, an important end, is already attained by your having been afflicted. O! let patience have its perfect work. Look to yourselves that ye lose not those things which ye have wrought, but that ye receive your reward. Still confide in the power, goodness and faithfulness of God. Still rely on the mediation, advocacy and

a Isa. liv. 11.

grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. And still expect those aids and supports from the blessed Spirit which you may yet need. And comfort yourselves with this animating consideration, that *the trial of your faith, which is much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, will be found unto praise, and honour, and glory, at the appearing of Jesus Christ* a.

DISCOURSE XIV.

PERSEVERANCE IN RELIGION THE CHRISTIAN'S DUTY.

JUDGES VIII. 4.——*Faint, yet pursuing*——

A FIT motto this for the arms the Christian soldier bears—descriptive at once of the fatigue he endures in the course of his warfare, and of his resolution, notwithstanding, to persevere. The words, I am sensible, relate to quite another matter; yet they may, without any impropriety, be accommodated to the great purpose of animating us to the duties of our Christian profession, which is the object of the present discourse. But, before I proceed to this improvement of them, it will be proper to give you a general view of the story to which they refer.

The Israelites, having sinned against God, were delivered into the hand of the Midianites, who grievously oppressed them for seven years. In these circumstances, feeling the sad effects of their folly and disobedience, they called upon God. God in his great mercy heard them, and having first sent a prophet to expostulate with them upon their ungrateful and rebellious conduct, raised them up a Saviour. This saviour was Gideon, a person of little note, being of *a family*, as he himself says, *poor in Manasseh, and the least in his father's house.* To him the

a 1 Pet. i. 7.

Lord appeared, and commanded him to go in his might and save Israel; at the same time giving him a sign, and afterwards at his request another, to confirm his faith in the promise of success. Gideon, endued with the Spirit of God, sets himself to the work he had undertaken. The altar of Baal he boldly attacks, destroys it, and cuts down the grove that was by it. At this the Midianites were highly incensed, as apprehending a general revolt to be intended. Wherefore they, and the Amalekites, and the children of the east, gathered themselves together, in prodigious numbers, to subdue this rebellion of the Israelites. Upon which Gideon blew the trumpet, and assembled about thirty-two thousand men to battle. But by the command of God, this army, though inconsiderable when compared with the Midianitish host, was reduced to three hundred: for the honour of the victory God was resolved to secure to himself. Before, however, any thing is attempted, Gideon receives direction to repair in disguise to the camp of the enemy; for he should there meet with a circumstance, which should fully satisfy him of the success of the enterprise he was presently going upon. To the camp he accordingly goes, and mingling himself with the soldiers, he hears one of them relate a dream, which another immediately interprets of the victory which the sword of Gideon was quickly to gain over them. Assured therefore of success he immediately returns, and prepares for the engagement. His three hundred men he divides into three companies, and puts a trumpet in every man's hand, with empty pitchers, and lamps within the pitchers. So he marches, in the midst of the night, to the outside of the camp; when on a sudden, at the word of command, his men break their pitchers, blow their trumpets, and cry, *The sword of the Lord, and of Gideon!* This strikes such a terror into the Midianitish host, that, imagining themselves betrayed, every man's sword is turned against his fellow, the consequence of which is a general slaughter throughout the camp. No less than an hundred and twenty thousand are slain; and fifteen thousand only make their escape. These, with their princes at their head, make the best of their way towards the country beyond Jordan; which Gideon perceiving, gives orders to the Ephraimites *to take the waters*, that is, to pass the fords before them. So he and his three hundred men

follow: and at Jordan, as the text tells us, they passed over *faint, yet pursuing.*—

That they were *faint* was not to be wondered at. They had endured great fatigue the past day and night. So speedy was the pursuit, that they had little or no time to take proper refreshment. And it is probable they had their fears, lest, notwithstanding all the success they had met with, the remaining few with their princes should escape, should rally again, and, supported with fresh succours, should return, and recover all the advantages they had lost. They were faint—*Yet they pursued.* Though their strength began to fail them, and so their spirits to flag; yet they resolved they would not give up. It was not enough that a hundred and twenty thousand were slain: the whole host must be destroyed. The consequence of a few only escaping, especially as their chiefs were among them, might be fatal. To stop here, therefore, at Jordan, and consider their work as done, would be very impolitic. So they would, in all likelihood, lose the advantages they had gained, and perhaps bring themselves into a more wretched state of servitude than they were in before. So they would betray a want of confidence in God, and disgrace themselves, their general, and the cause in which they were embarked. Whereas, on the contrary, if they pursued, the issue, they had reason to believe, would be glorious. God had strengthened them hitherto, and why might not they hope he would still strengthen them? What had happened shewed the mighty power of God, and why should they distrust that power? Fewer remained to be subdued than had already been conquered. Gideon, that man of God, was at their head, and he was spiriting them to the pursuit. It would be greatly to their honour to reduce the kings of Midian, and for ever henceforth, to put it out of the power of these cruel princes to oppress them. In short, if they succeeded (as they had all the reason in the world to believe they should), the evils they had endured would quickly be compensated with rest and quiet; they would get immortal glory by this brave and spirited action; and they would not only rescue themselves and their country from servitude and misery, but be the happy instruments of establishing their future liberties on a more sure foundation, than they had now a long while enjoyed them.—Animated, therefore,

with these considerations, they pursued. And success attended the pursuit. They took not only the princes, but the two kings of Midian, and discomfited all the host. Thus were the Israelites delivered out of the hands of their oppressors, and restored to the enjoyment of their former liberties and privileges.

And now, many useful reflections might be made on this extraordinary story—on the miserable and helpless state to which the people of Israel were reduced, when God thus appeared for them; and which was the effect of their sins—on the great mercy of God in hearing their cries, when they called upon him—on the seasonableness of their salvation, and the extraordinary means by which it was obtained—and on the valour of Gideon and his men in pursuing the advantages which God had given them. On these things, I say, we might make many useful reflections of a general kind.

Nay, as the Jewish state had a reference to the Christian, and the events of the one were many of them figurative of that great event which took place at the establishment of the other; I might accommodate this story of the redemption of Israel to our redemption by Christ. I might shew you that the subjection of mankind to sin and Satan and death, is far more abject and wretched than that of the Israelites to the princes of Midian—that as *their* deliverance was of God, so is *ours*—that as God raised *them* up a saviour from the lowest of the people, and who was yet a mighty man of valour; so he has raised *us* up a Saviour out of Nazareth, and who is yet his own Son—that as *their* salvation was evidently owing to the divine interposition, and yet was not effected without means; so is *ours*—and that as the advantages of that victory which Gideon obtained for them, were to be eagerly pursued by them; so we are *to work out our salvation with fear and trembling*, and to oppose with vigour our spiritual enemies, knowing that Christ by his death has secured the victory for us. On all these things I might enlarge: but I shall wave most of them, and take up only the last idea mentioned.—

Christ by his death has obtained a conquest for us over all the powers of darkness: but our enemies are not so far defeated as not to exist, or to be totally discouraged from any farther attempt towards our ruin. Animated therefore by what our Cap-

tain hath done, and the advantages we have ourselves already gained, we are to push the victory. It is a warfare, and a painful one too: and it may be we are sometimes upon the point of *fainting*. But, *though faint, we must pursue.*—Now in order to excite you to the great duty of perseverance in religion, to which you see I have accommodated the language of the text, I propose,

I. Briefly to describe the Christian warfare; and,

II. To consider the various temper and conduct of the good man amidst the fatigues and dangers of it; and the reasons of his faintness on the one hand, and of his resolution to persevere on the other.

I. Let me give you some general description of the Christian warfare.

The life of a real disciple of Jesus is frequently thus represented in Scripture. *War a good warfare a. Fight the good fight of faith b. Endure hardness, as a good soldier of Christ c.* If it be asked, What is the *Cause* he asserts? and what are the grounds of the quarrel? I answer, It is the cause of God and Christ, the cause of truth and liberty, a cause in which his present interest, and his future and everlasting welfare are intimately concerned. It is a dispute upon a question of infinite importance, Whether he shall be happy or miserable? a slave to the most cruel and despotic tyrants, or a servant to him who alone can make him free?—If it be asked, Who the *Enemies* are with whom he has to contend? They are these—Satan, the prince of the power of the air, that great foe of God and man, who, *as a roaring lion, walketh about seeking whom he may devour d*—Wicked men, and the opposers of Christ, who are the emissaries of Satan—The world with all its pomps and vanities—And the evil passions and corruptions of the heart. Enemies numerous, subtle and malicious. Strong ones, who have wounded and cast down thousands; who give no quarter, but to those who will quietly yield to their usurpation, and ignominiously submit to their unlawful power; and who, if they cannot conquer, will do their utmost to distress, afflict and torment. Enemies who are ever upon the watch, either artfully

a 1 Tim. i. 18. *b* Chap. vi. 12.
c 2 Tim. ii. 2, 3. *d* 2 Pet. v. 8.

to betray the Christian into sin, or else openly to assault him with temptation.—The *Conflict*, it may from hence be concluded, is often fierce and violent, and sometimes to appearance of very doubtful issue. Many are the struggles the good man suffers within, betwixt flesh and spirit, grace and corruption. Many the attacks made upon him by the objects of sense, by the alluring prospects of gain, honour, and pleasure, and by the threats of poverty, reproach and persecution. Many the trials he endures from pride, unbelief, sloth, passion, and other evil affections. Many the subtle, and perhaps blasphemous, insinuations of the great adversary. And many the doubts, fears, and tumults of his own breast. Sometimes victory seems to incline on the side of the Christian, and at other times on that of the enemy.—And then as to the *Captain* under whose banner he fights, and the *Weapons* with which he is furnished for the battle. Christ is his Captain: an able, skilful, generous commander; who has himself waged war with these enemies, and bravely withstood their united and most violent assaults; who by his grace has called the Christian into the field, armed him for the fight, and assured him of all needful supports in the time of temptation and danger. The shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, the breast-plate of righteousness, and the sword of the Spirit, are the weapons he has provided; and success he has promised to all them who heartily engage in his service.—In a word, the great *Object* proposed is the total overthrow of sin, Satan and death; a happy manumission of freedom from the servitude of these base and cruel tyrants: and the everlasting enjoyment of God in the world to come.—A noble warfare this! A warfare in which, you see, by reason of the corrupt and apostate state of human nature, we are necessarily engaged, unless we will be for ever miserable. A warfare which promises the happiest success, as it is founded in the mediation of the Son of God. And a warfare in which millions have been engaged before us, prophets, apostles and martyrs, yea, the blessed Jesus himself. In fine, a warfare, which, though it be painful, is but short; and which, though it may draw after it many outward inconveniences and many inward sorrows, yet is glorious in itself, and shall in the issue be crowned with joys and triumphs and pleasures inconceivable and without end.

Thus you have a general view of this warfare. Which leads me to consider,

II. The various temper and conduct of the Christian, amidst the toils and labours of it; and the reasons of his many discouragements on the one hand, and of his resolution to persevere on the other. We cannot surely, under certain circumstances, better describe him, than as *faint, yet pursuing.*

FIRST. Let us view him, as he sometimes is, *faint* and dispirited.

The most intrepid soldier that ever took the field, has, upon some occasions, trembled, or however felt a degree of timidity. And the man whose constitution is the most robust and healthful, cannot always boast of an exemption from faintness and weariness. No wonder then that such, at certain intervals, is the sad experience of the Christian, in regard of the great concerns of religion. Ah! how do his spirits languish, and how does his strength fail him! What anxious care is there in his countenance, and what feebleness in his hands! His soul melts like wax within him, and his knees smite one against another. He knows not how to march forward, how to charge the enemy, or how to use the weapons given him. The powers of his mind are, as it were, sunk and broken, and the very nerves of his soul relaxed and enfeebled. So it sometimes was with David, as appears from his many sorrowful complaints in the book of Psalms. And so it was with the disciples of our Lord, at the instant their Master was contending with the powers of darkness. But how is this? To what is it to be ascribed? Why, perhaps,

1. To the past toils and labours they have endured.

He who has borne the hardships of a long campaign, or is just emerged from some furious encounter with the enemy, or halts a moment in the midst of a long pursuit, will be apt to feel some degree of languor. His spirits will flag, and his heart faint. In like manner will the Christian be affected with the fatigues of his warfare. Frequent and daily struggles with inward corruptions, and with outward temptations, will oppress and sink even his animal spirits, especially when he has been foiled, or the enemy through surprise has gained any advantage against him. It is sad to hear the complaints that now and then drop from his

lips. "Ah! how long shall I be thus dispirited, and almost worn out with the incessant clamour, and repeated vexatious attacks of these foolish passions! How long shall the world, with its anxious cares and concerns, its vain hopes and prospects, assault my judgment, and lead captive my affections! Woe is me that I sojourn in Meshech, and dwell in the tents of Keder! O that I had the wings of a dove! then would I fly away, and be at rest." It was this kind of faintness in his warfare, which, in a degree however, the apostle felt, when he uttered that sorrowful complaint—*O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death a!* And the like was the experience of the holy psalmist when he cried out, *My soul cleaveth to the dust: quicken thou me, according to thy word b.*

In such manner also is the Christian sometimes affected by the active duties and services of his profession. The work indeed to which Christ calls us, brings in the end its own reward with it: *Great peace have they which love thy law, and nothing shall offend them c.* And, *in keeping his commands, there is great reward d.* Yet there is no serving the interests of religion, especially in some particular stations, without suffering pain and fatigue. He who is zealous for the glory of God, and laborious in his endeavours to do good, will, on some occasions, through an extraordinary exertion of his spirits and strength, feel great lassitude and weariness. Nor is it possible to struggle long with the passions and prejudices of wicked men, and boldly to stem the torrent of vice and sin, which ever exposes such who attempt it to more or less reproach and persecution, without sometimes enduring a languor and depression of animal nature.—His fatigues then of body and mind, arising from repeated conflicts with sin and sense, with Satan, the world and his own heart, and from the labours of his particular station and calling, are one cause of the Christian's fainting.

2. This sad circumstance may sometimes be owing to the want of proper refreshment.

The people who, under Saul, pursued the Philistines, not having tasted food for a whole day, it is said, *fainted e.* Nor was it to be wondered at. Without the seasonable and neces-

a Rom. vii. 24. *b* Psal. cxix. 25. *c* Psal. cxix. 165.
d Psal. xix. 11. *e* 1 Sam. xiv. 31.

sary supports of life, a man's spirits will sink, and his strength fail him. Such then, in another sense, is the cause of that languor and weariness the Christian sometimes feels. The immortal mind requires food to sustain it, as well as the body. Its views, desires, hopes and expectations must be fed and kept alive by objects suited to its renewed nature, or it will grow faint and sickly. And, blessed be God! there is in the gospel of Christ, in its doctrines and promises, the richest entertainment for the faith and hope of a Christian. But alas! sometimes, through the ill state of his spiritual health, he has little or no appetite to these provisions. Or if he has, yet through the want of the divine blessing, they do not refresh and nourish him as might be wished. Now when God withholds his enlivening presence, when past cheerful scenes are forgotten, when future bright and animating prospects are veiled, and when perplexing doubts arise as to his interest in the divine favour, is it strange that he faints?—that his soul like David's, is *cast down within him a*?—and that, like him of whom Isaiah speaks, *walking in darkness and seeing no light*, he is gloomy, afflicted and discouraged *b*.

And this is the sad and mournful experience of some Christians in the midst of their warfare, and of those too, who in the general, are hearty and resolute in the cause of religion. Hungry and weary, their souls faint within them. And how, in these circumstances, to contend with the powers of darkness, they know not. Like the Jews in their captive state, they hang their harps on the willows, and have no heart to sing the song of the Lord in a strange land. But such dejection as this, however uncomfortable and distressing for the present, may, and will in the end turn to their account. A wise and merciful God permits them to faint for a while, that, perceiving their own weakness, they may be secured from presumption and self-confidence; and that he may magnify his grace in the relief and comfort, he designs in their extremity to afford them. So the apostle was just on the point of fainting, when the Captain under whose banner he fought, and of whom he had thrice besought assistance, said unto him, *My grace is sufficient for thee c*. Again,

a Psal. xlii. 5. *b* Isa. l. 10. *c* 2 Cor. xii. 9.

3. They sometimes faint through the dread of being overcome.

This is the case, at certain seasons, with the best of men, and those who, upon the whole, are not chargeable with pusillanimity and cowardice. And how such fear is generated in the heart may be easily imagined. To be modest, diffident, jealous and suspicious, I mean in regard of himself, and the dangers to which he is exposed, is the proper character of a real Christian. Now these tempers, when balanced with a lively faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the influence of divine providence and grace, are of the greatest use, and subserve the most important purposes. But when the good man loses sight of these great objects, and is overwhelmed with the darkness and discouragements of unbelief, it is easy to see how his humility, diffidence and jealousy must degenerate into servile and distressing fears. In such a sad situation he views the enemy in the most formidable light. The powers he has to contend with seem to him unconquerable; as did the Canaanites to the men of Israel, upon the report of the spies. Their strength, malice and address strike him with the utmost dread. And while he reflects, how many have been subdued by their oppressive power, and how feeble are his warmest efforts to resist them; forgetting at the same time, the advantages he has already gained, and the aid and support promised him in the Bible; while, I say, he is thus enveloped in darkness, and surrounded on every side with gloomy objects, he can hardly forbear pronouncing victory on the side of the enemy: "Ah! I shall one day perish by their hand," as said David of Saul *a*. Thus enervated and broken, no wonder he faints, or at least, is in a disposition to faint.

Yet, amidst all—though his past fatigues have been great—though he is in want of present refreshment—and though he is nearly overwhelmed with the sad apprehension of being overcome; he still resolves in the strength of God he will *pursue*.

The grounds of this resolution are next to be considered. In the mean time let us make two or three reflections on what hath been said.

a 1 Sam. xxvii. 1.

1. We see that undisturbed rest and tranquillity are not to be expected here. Of life in general it may be affirmed, that it is a warfare. But the idea is peculiarly applicable to the present state and condition of a Christian. Wherefore they greatly mistake it, who enter upon a profession of religion with high expectations of enjoying an uninterrupted series of felicity. This in the nature of things cannot be. The very idea of a warfare teaches the contrary. Take heed then, Sirs, how you entertain such flattering hopes as these. Religion, it is true, is the most cheerful thing in the world. It is the best remedy for our fears, and the noblest cordial for our fainting spirits, amidst the vicissitudes and troubles of life. Yet, such is the depravity of human nature, so powerful are the impressions which sensible objects make upon our hearts, so inconstant our passions, and so various our frames, that we do not, we cannot always enjoy that composure, satisfaction and pleasure, which religion in its own proper nature is adapted to excite and promote. Nor is it fit we should. For if this were the case, we should be apt to consider the present state as our rest, and be in no disposition to strike our tents, and march forward to the promised land. Besides, there are purposes of as great real utility to be served by the difficulties and sorrows the Christian endures in his way to heaven, as by the hopes and comforts with which he is sometimes distinguished. Think it not strange then, that you are frequently dispirited, fatigued and cast down. Such hath been the lot of other good men before you. This is a state of warfare. You are in an enemy's country; at best like a wayfaring man at an inn, not yet come to the rest, the inheritance which the Lord your God hath given you *a*.

2. The Christian you see, may be reduced very low, and yet not overcome. This I mention for the encouragement of the truly sincere and humble disciple of Jesus, who is almost overwhelmed with doubts and fears as to the issue of the conflict. It is no uncommon thing for persons in these circumstances to improve that dejection of mind they feel into an argument against themselves, and to reason from thence that GOD hath

a Ex vita ita discedo tanquam ex hospitio, non tanquam ex domo: commorandi enim natura diversorium nobis, non habitandi locum dedit.—CIC. *De Senect.* 23.

forsaken them, and that therefore they shall fall by the hands of their enemies. But, besides the consideration just now mentioned, that others have been as deeply dejected as you, it should be remembered, that your dejection may turn to your account, provided it be not unreasonably indulged. God often permits us to feel our own weakness, that we may with the greater fervency implore divine assistance. And when this is the case, we are in much less real danger, however gloomy and discouraging our own apprehensions may be, than if we were self-confident, rash and precipitate. It hath also frequently been observed, that when the enemy, elated by some sudden and partial success, have presumptuously called the day their own, there hath been a turn in favour of the oppressed party, succours have come in to their relief, they have rallied again, and returned to the fight with greater resolution and success than ever. And why may you not hope that this will be your case? Be of good courage, Christian. Stand to your post. Trust in God. And depend upon it, obstinate as the assault may be, you shall yet come off *more than conqueror through him who hath loved you.*

3. Let those who have as yet felt little faintness in this conflict, take heed how they presume. Firmness of natural constitution, vigour of animal spirits, and the warm zeal of early life in the cause of religion, do sometimes prove snares to persons of an upright mind. The commendable caution and thoughtfulness of other Christians they are apt to construe into indifference and sloth; and are too prone, through want of experience and reflection, to conclude concerning themselves, that they are superior to every possible difficulty and discouragement. If I speak to any such, let me entreat you, Sirs, to beware how you indulge this uncharitable and vain temper of mind. Every approach towards self-confidence and presumption is dangerous, and will give the enemy an advantage against you. *Let not him that girdeth on his harness, boast himself as he that putteth it off.* Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. God sometimes permits the youths to be faint and weary, and the young men to fall; while in his great mercy he giveth power to the faint, and to them that have no might he increaseth strength *a*.

a Isa. xl. 29, 30.

Mingle therefore caution with your zeal, and self-diffidence with all your firmness and resolution.

PART II.

We have seen the Christian *fainting* amidst the fatigues of his warfare. And we are now to view him,

Secondly, Resuming his wonted courage, and in the strength of divine grace, resolving to *pursue*. "He will not ignominiously submit. No. He will keep the field—maintain the conflict—push the victory." A brave resolution this! A resolution to which he feels himself impelled by gratitude, duty and interest. He considers what will be the consequence of yielding on the one hand, and of pursuing on the other. In order therefore to animate you, Christians, to perseverance, let me represent to you these consequences in all their solemnity and importance.

I. What will be the effect, should you throw down your arms, yield to the enemy, and apostatize from your profesion?

I am satisfied indeed, that he who is well affected to the cause of Christ, and engages in it upon right principles, will be victorious. Of this we may be assured, not only from the nature of religion itself, which is described as *a well of water springing up unto everlasting life* a, as the *anointing* which *abideth* in them that *have received* it, and as *seed which remaineth in him who is born of God* b; but likewise from many clear and express promises to that purpose, which I must not stay here to recite. Yet it is very observable, that the Christian is frequently so addressed, exhorted and reasoned with in the Bible as if the event of his profession were doubtful. *Let us fear, lest a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it* c. *Brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure; for if ye do these things, ye shall never fail* d. And the apostle, having exhorted the Corinthians *so to run as that they might obtain*, thus speaks concerning himself: *I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection; lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a cast-away* e. Now, though the event is well known to God,

a John iv. 14. b 1 John ii. 27.; iii. 9. c Heb. iv. 1.
d 2 Pet. i. 10. e 1 Cor. ix. 24, 27.

and he will most certainly fulfil the unalterable promises of his grace; yet there is the greatest propriety in these admonitions and cautions. For since God deals with us as reasonable creatures, and since it is unquestionably our duty to persevere; addresses of this sort are the fittest means to quicken us to diligence and watchfulness, and so to subserve the great end which infinite wisdom and mercy propose, even our everlasting salvation. The utility also of these general exhortations, clearly appears from a reflection, that men are prone to deceive themselves as to their state towards God, and that the characters of good and bad are too often blended under a profession of religion. I am fully justified therefore, by the example of Scripture, and that founded on the truest reason, in warning the Christian of the dreadful consequences of apostacy, and so urging him to perseverance. Consider then,

1. That if you are so unhappy as to yield, you will lose the advantages you have already gained. So says the apostle John, *Look to yourselves, that we lose not those things which we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward a.* He who has been any time engaged in this warfare, must needs have reaped some of the fruits of it. And how sad! to struggle, and then yield; to get the victory in a few instances, and through weariness and inconstancy to lose the benefit resulting from it. Some there are of this character, who having set their hand to the plough, look back. Nor is their condition to be enough lamented! With at least an appearance of zeal and resolution, they commenced the disciples of Jesus, and for a while gave fair and promising hopes to those around them, that they would shine with distinguished lustre in the rank they filled. Advantages they had gained. They had reformed their lives, shook off their former vain company, got the better of some ill habits, assumed the venerable name of Christians, and perhaps endured reproach for the sake of religion. But alas! they grew weary, they desisted, they gave up. And such was the sad issue of all their faint struggles, their heartless prayers, their partial reformations. O what pity! *Ye did run well*, we may say to such, in the language of the apostle, *who did hinder? Where is the blessedness ye spake of? are ye so foolish? having begun in the spirit,*

a 2 John 8.

are ye now made perfect by the flesh? Have ye suffered so many things in vain a?

Now their conduct, lamentable as it is, may be improved by the real Christian to his own unspeakable advantage. Look back on your past engagements, and say, Whether you can find it in your heart to renounce them? Call to mind what you have endured, and what you have enjoyed, and ask yourself, Whether you can be content *to lose the things you have* thus *wrought*, and *not to receive a full reward?* You are perhaps, at present, borne down with doubts, and fears, and sorrows. But will you, after the many cries and tears you have poured out to Heaven, after the many vows and resolutions you have formed, after the many attacks you have sustained from stubborn and powerful corruptions, and after the many signal victories you have won; will you, I say, after all give up? If so, you have prayed in vain, you have fought in vain, you have suffered in vain, you have conquered in vain.—But it is farther to be remembered,

2. That if you do not *pursue*, you will not only lose the advantages you have gained, but you will be overcome. And what so much to be dreaded as a defeat, a total defeat, a defeat in such a cause as this, and which draws after it consequences, the most important and alarming? Here *shame* and *misery* present themselves to our view. Nor let us hastily dismiss them from our attention. Give them a place, Christian, at least for a while, in your most serious thoughts. I speak to him who, instead of renewing the fight, parlies with temptation; who, instead of enduring hardness as a good soldier of Christ, is unhappily sunk into a careless, neutral, indolent state.

Dread of *shame* is a powerful incentive to action. It is so with every brave and ingenuous mind. And if *to conquer is glorious b*, to be conquered, especially in the cause you are engaged, and in the situation you are placed, must be base and ignominious to the last degree. The triumphs of Satan! the triumphs of the world! the triumphs of inbred lusts and passions! how ungrateful, how mortifying, how insufferable in the ear of him, who hath conceived a sovereign contempt for these enemies of God and man! and who hath long since judged their usurpa-

a Gal. v. 7. iv. 15. iii. 3, 4. *b* Καλὸν τὸ νικᾶν. Eurip.

tion and dominion, the most abject and wretched yoke, that can possibly be imposed on an immortal mind! And yet these taunts, these reproaches you must endure, if you submit. To this purpose our Saviour speaks under a different metaphor, *If a man lay the foundation of a building, and is not able to finish it, they that behold it will begin to mock him, saying, this man began to build, and was not able to finish a.*—Consider likewise, Christian, the dishonour which such a base submission may reflect, through the perverse reasonings of wicked men, on the noble cause you have asserted, on the generous Captain under whose banner you fight, and on the brave company in which you are enrolled. A thought this which cannot but sensibly touch his heart, who enters into the genuine spirit of religion, and feels an unconquerable attachment to Christ, and to his fellow-disciples. It is a striking passage of one of the ancient fathers, who, in order to rouse Christians from their sloth, and to animate them in their warfare, represents Satan as thus contrasting the services of his disciples, to those of Christ's disciples, and so upbraiding him with the baseness and perfidy of such who call themselves Christians. "For those, O Christ, whom thou seest with me, I have not been buffeted, scourged or crucified; I have not shed my blood for them, nor redeemed them, though they are my family, at the expence of my passion and death: no, nor do I promise them a heavenly kingdom, or, having restored to them immortality, invite them back again to paradise. And yet they present me gifts exceeding great and precious, and acquired with much pains and labour. Shew me now, O Christ, any of thy disciples, who, though they are instructed by thy precepts, and shall receive for earthly, heavenly things, have yet the gratitude to make thee such expensive returns as these.—With these my terrene and perishing gifts (meaning the *spectacula* or public shews frequent at that time) no one is fed, or clothed, or comforted; they all perish in the idle vanity of deceiving pleasures, between the madness of him who exhibits, and of those who behold them.—Thou promisest eternal life to them that serve thee; and yet thy servants, whom thou wilt thus honour with divine and heavenly rewards, scarcely equal mine, who amidst all their labour perish. O! my dear brethren, adds the pious

a Luke xiv. 29, 30.

Father, what shall we answer to these things *a*?"—Surely then, if the not having served Christ with that zeal and attention which his generosity and love demand, is a just occasion of shame and sorrow; disgrace and infamy must be the lot of him who absolutely deserts the service of such a Master, and enlists again under the banner of Satan.

Nor is reproach and shame the only effect of such conduct: it must, it will be followed with *misery*, both in this life, and in that which is to come. Doubtless there is some kind of pleasure which wicked men feel in the indulgence of their lusts; but is that pleasure capable of proving a temptation to you, Christian, to renounce your allegiance to Christ—you who have known what the opposite pleasures mean? Or, if it may be supposed for a moment to shake your resolution, does it not lose all its force, when you come to reflect on the perplexity, guilt and horror it draws after it? Can you think calmly of being reduced to your former state of vassalage and slavery, or of being treated with far greater indignity and cruelty, than Pharaoh treated the Israelites, or Nebuchadnezzar the Jewish prince? Can you be content not only to be spoiled of all your wealth, and stripped of your royal raiment, but to have your eyes put out, your feet bound with fetters of brass, and a loathsome dungeon appointed you for your residence? yet such must be your hard lot if you submit. If sin and Satan, and the world triumph, it must be at the expence of truth, honour, peace, and every thing that is dear to you. Reason must be dethroned, the judgment perverted, the conscience enslaved, and the passions, all of them, led away into the most painful and wretched servitude. And can you submit to these miseries? Be it so that you are greatly dejected and borne down with past fatigues, the want of present refreshment, and doubtful apprehensions as to the issue of the combat. Yet even this state is preferable to that of a slave. If you tamely surrender yourself into the hands of your enemies, you will be held faster in the chains of captivity than ever; you will contract guilt upon your conscience, which will either sooner or later become intolerable; and the end will be ruin, total irrecoverable ruin. 'When the unclean spirit,' says our Saviour, 'is gone out of a man, he walketh

a Cyprian. Edit. Oxon. p. 206.

through dry places, seeking rest, and findeth none. Then he saith, I will return into my house from whence I came out, and when he is come, he findeth it empty, swept and garnished. Then goeth he, and taketh with himself seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter in and dwell there, and the last state of that man is worse than the first *a*.' To the same purpose says the apostle Peter, 'If after they have escaped the pollutions of the world, through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein and overcome, the latter end is worse than the beginning. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered to them *b*.'

It is sad to describe the fearful state of the apostate, when conscience is thoroughly roused from its sleep, when the harbingers of death warn him of his approaching dissolution, and the terrors of the last judgment set themselves in array before him. His countenance, his gesture, his language, loudly express the anguish of his spirit. "Ah me! how deplorable is my condition! All is darkness around me, all horror and misery before me. I am undone, utterly undone. No assistance is to be obtained from without, no source of comfort can I find within. My conscience condemns me, and the sentence of a justly provoked God seals my condemnation. My friends stand aloof from me, and the powers of darkness triumph over me. Sorer punishment awaits me than was inflicted on the disobedient Israelites. And I am worthy of it, for I have *trodden under foot the Son of God*, I have *counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith* I was *sanctified an unholy thing, and* I have *done despite unto the Spirit of grace*. And now *there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment, and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries* c. O miserable wretch that I am! I fall a victim, a deplorable victim to my own perverseness and impiety, to the rage and malice of devils, and to the just resentments of him who is a consuming fire." And O! who can imagine the tremendous consequences?——

a Matt. xii. 43—45. *b* 2 Pet. ii. 20, 21. *c* Heb. x. 26—29.

Will it not then be madness to halt, to throw down your arms, to submit!—But I forbear any farther to address the passions of *shame* and *fear*, and proceed,

II. To lay before the timorous and discouraged Christian such considerations, as are adapted to quicken and enliven him, amidst the fatigues and dangers of his spiritual warfare. Here then let me remind you,

1. Of the goodness of the cause wherein you are embarked.

There are two different and opposite interests established in our world, which divide the affections and pursuits of all mankind. The one is that of error and sin, the other that of truth and religion. Over the former presides Satan, over the latter Christ. The grand object of the god of this world is to enslave the souls of men, and to make them miserable for ever. To which end he employs in his service all the arts of error, flattery and deception, and all the powers of worldly emolument, sensual gratification, and evil example. And, as in the beginning, he seduced and corrupted the human race, so by these measures he still farther blinds the eyes of men, hardens their hearts, captivates their affections, and confirms them in their apostacy. Under his banner the great part of mankind is enlisted; and to his artifice, and their own corrupt inclinations, are to be ascribed all the ignorance, wickedness and misery which prevail over the earth. On the contrary, the great object which Christ proposes is as generous and noble, as *his* is iniquitous and malevolent. It is to rescue men from the dominion of Satan and their lusts, to reduce them to their allegiance to the blessed God, and to make them happy both here and hereafter. And the grand mean he has appointed to this end is the gospel, wherein a discovery is made of the most interesting and important truths, all admirably adapted, with a divine influence, to throw light upon our dark minds, to give a new bias to our depraved affections, and to guide and influence our conduct. Now, it is to the guidance of this leader that you, Christian, have submitted yourself. And surely, there is every imaginable motive arising out of this great cause in which you are engaged, to inspire you with resolution and constancy.

It is the cause of truth and righteousness. If religion were a cunningly devised fable, its great author an impostor, its doc-

trines false and erroneous, its precepts severe and unreasonable, and its promises flattering and deceitful, it were not to be wondered that you should grow faint and weary in the defence of it. Zeal in such a cause would be highly criminal; and in the end would prove as vain and fruitless, as it is base and inglorious. But the reverse is the case here. Religion is founded in the truest reason, and is most acceptable to God. You have no doubt, Christian, that the dominion which Satan claims over mankind, is a most iniquitous and cruel usurpation, and that the principles, passions and pursuits of the men of this world, are a shameful perversion of all the laws of truth, equity and goodness. You are well assured that Jesus your Almighty Saviour came from God, that the great object of his mission was not only most just and equitable but generous and kind, that his doctrine is according to godliness, his precepts fit and becoming, and his promises faithful and true. In a cause therefore so righteous in itself, and in favour of which, God has given the clearest and fullest attestations, you may, you ought to be courageous. Great is the truth, and it will prevail.

It is also farther to be remembered, that this is a cause to which you are attached by all possible obligations of gratitude and love. You fight in defence of the honour, interest and kingdom, not only of your rightful sovereign, but of your great deliverer and friend. If the ardent concern of a prince for the happiness of his subjects, if his condescending to the meanest offices, his enduring the most painful labours, and exposing himself to the greatest hazards to secure and promote their essential interests, are reasons why they should cheerfully venture their lives and fortunes in his service; motives of this sort may be urged with peculiar advantage in the present case. It is impossible fully to describe the cordial and unshaken affection of Christ for his disciples, the disgrace, pain and anguish he has endured on their behalf, and the exalted honours, joys and pleasures he has procured for them, at the expence of his precious blood. Think of the bliss and glory he possessed in the world above. Contemplate the humble form in which he appeared here on earth. Call up to your view, his immense labours and exquisite sufferings. Follow him from Bethlehem to Golgotha. View him resolutely contending with the powers

of darkness, patiently bearing the cruel abuse of Jews and Romans, and meekly offering his life a sacrifice to divine justice on the cross—doing and suffering all this, to reconcile you to God, to set you free from the slavery of sin, to secure to you the substantial blessings of religion here, and to entitle you to a crown of glory hereafter. Reflect on these things, and say, Whether so kind a Friend, so generous a Saviour, and so renowned a Prince, may not demand your warmest affection, your firmest allegiance, and your most unwearied services? Does not the lively remembrance of these great obligations, inspire you with new resolution and vigour, when discouraged and borne down with the fatigues of your warfare!

Nor is it to be forgotten, that this is a cause wherein your own interest is nearly concerned. That was the object which, as you have seen, the Son of God proposed in becoming the Captain of your salvation. And, whilst you are fighting under his banner, you are pursuing that object. You are contending, not for the perishing enjoyments of this world, but for unfading honours, substantial pleasures, durable riches and righteousness. And can you be neutral or indifferent in a cause so essentially important as this? Or shall it be in the power of the enemy, by any kind of opposition, to intimidate you, when the question is, Whether you shall be happy or miserable, the vassal of Satan or a servant of the living God? Every advantage you gain against your lusts possesses you of a present reward. And are not peace of conscience, a sense of the divine favour, and a joyful hope of future and endless felicity, objects deserving of your most ardent attention and pursuit?—blessings which will more than compensate all the discouragements, pains and sorrows you endure, in your conflicts with sin and sense?—In a cause therefore so just, so noble, so interesting, it is criminal to be indifferent, it is dishonourable to be timorous.

2. Another animating consideration is, the seasonable and effectual support you may depend upon receiving, in the course of your warfare.

It were wrong to flatter ourselves with a notion, that the difficulties we have to contend with as Christians, are few, occasional, and of trifling consequence. He who hath any knowledge of his own heart, and is at all acquainted with the world,

must be sensible that this is a very great mistake. Nor am I afraid even to magnify these difficulties, while I have such encouragements and assistances to oppose to them, as the word of God insures, and the wisest and best of men have found to be every way adequate and sufficient. Admitting then that you have very many corruptions to struggle with; that your worldly connections, businesses and concerns are all of them exceedingly perplexing and ensnaring; that Satan and his emissaries use their utmost endeavours to subdue and enslave you; that you have little knowledge and experience, many prejudices and weaknesses, a deceitful heart and inconstant passions: and, in fine, that you are, of yourself, unequal to the powerful, united and continued assaults of these your enemies: yet you have no reason, Christian, to be discouraged. Say not, in the language of Elisha's servant, when he beheld the city encompassed with a host of the Syrians, *Alas, Master, how shall we do?* For it may be replied in the words of the prophet, *They that be with us, are more than they that be with them a.*

God is with you: nor have you any just ground to question it. The cause is his. You engaged in it, at his instance, with the help of his grace, and from a desire to approve yourself to him, as well as to escape the miseries with which you was threatened. Think you then that he will desert you, or that he will withhold that support you need? He will not. He hath said he will not: and he is faithful who hath promised. *Fear not, I am with thee: be not dismayed, I am thy God: I will strengthen thee, yea I will help thee, yea I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness b. My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness c. No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper d. I will never leave thee nor forsake thee e.* You may therefore boldly say, *The Lord is my helper f; through God I shall do valiantly; for he it is that shall tread down my enemies g.* Guided by unerring wisdom, defended by Almighty power, and sustained by infinite compassion and goodness, what dangers may you not escape! what dif-

a 2 Kings vi. 15, 16. b Isa. xli. 10. c 2 Cor. xii. 9.
d Isa. liii. 17. e Heb. xiii. 5. f Ver. 6.
g Psal. lx. 12.

ficulties may you not surmount! what wonders may you not perform!

Christ also is your Captain. And, in his character, conduct and example, you have every possible consideration to animate and encourage you. Need I remind you of the transcendent excellencies he possesses; his skill and address, his magnanimity and resolution, his tenderness and love? These he eminently displayed, during his own personal conflict with the powers of darkness, in the days of his flesh. And now he is in heaven, he exerts them for the defence and support of his followers in their militant state. He was *made perfect through sufferings, that he might bring many sons unto glory.* To give them a title to victory he died, and to secure the victory to them he lives. For this great purpose he employs all his influence on their behalf; an influence which extends over universal nature, and is subject to no controul whatever. With his divine Father he uses his interest, in the character of Mediator, that they may prevail. The affairs of providence he adjusts in such a manner, as to contribute to the success of their cause. The malice of their enemies he restrains, their schemes he detects and counteracts, and their haughty power he checks and subdues. With a compassionate eye he looks down upon them, when overwhelmed with the troubles of life, when wearied and broken by painful conflicts with sin and sense, and when discouraged and oppressed with numerous and grievous temptations. Nor does he fail, on certain occasions, by various means, such as his word, his ordinances, and the seasonable influence of his grace and Spirit, to comfort their drooping hearts, and to strengthen their feeble hands. *The bruised reed he will not break, and smoking flax he will not quench, until he send forth judgment unto victory a.* And have not these considerations, Christian, thus addressed to your own feelings, the most animating effect?

I might here also put you in mind of the weapons with which you are furnished, the company in which you are enlisted, and the wages you receive. You do not meet the enemy naked and defenceless. He who leads you into the field, first commands you to *put on the whole armour of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all to*

a Matt. xii. 20.

stand a. Truth is your girdle, righteousness your breast-plate, faith your shield, salvation your helmet, the word of God your sword, and your feet are shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace. Your fellow-soldiers are the excellent of the earth, the loyal subjects of the Prince of peace, the sons of God, the heirs of glory—not a few only, but an hundred and forty and four thousand, and thousands of thousands, whom no man can number. And the wages appointed you are adequate to your necessities, yea more than enough for your subsistence, such I may add as will largely compensate all your pains and sorrows; even the satisfaction of a peaceful conscience, the pleasures resulting from communion with God, and the joys on certain occasions which arise from the unclouded prospects of a future blessed immortality.

And now, clad in armour proof against every assault—led on by a Captain of unconquerable magnanimity—supported by a numerous body of saints and confessors, all shouting, THE SWORD OF THE LORD AND HIS CHRIST—angels with wishful eyes waiting the event—a cloud of witnesses on every side, marking your conduct—and you yourself, Christian, pouring out incessant cries to Heaven, to prosper the enterprise—I say, thus advancing, in defence of the noblest cause that was ever asserted, and relying upon the power and faithfulness of Almighty God, What have you to fear?—Victory, complete victory, shall crown the day. And so I am led,

3. and lastly, To describe the triumph which will succeed the fatigues and dangers of this painful warfare—

Describe it, did I say? It is not to be fully described. The utmost I can do is only to draw out some faint and general representation of it. The scene will be glorious beyond all imagination, as may naturally be concluded from the greatness of the cause, the fierceness of the contention, the zeal with which Christ has interested himself in it, and the important consequences it draws after it. If to subdue, totally subdue, the most haughty, cruel, and powerful enemies; if to emerge, in the full enjoyment of health, out of all the horrors of war; if to return home, richly laden with the spoils of victory; if to be crowned with the applauses of his prince and his country,

a Eph. vi. 10—18.

and henceforth quietly to possess, not only his liberties, but an affluence of all earthly good: if these are the prospects which animate the soldier in the day of battle, and push him on to the most hazardous enterprises; What may not you, Christian, expect, as the fruit of that far more noble conflict in which you are engaged? The moment death has done his office, your toils, and pains, and sorrows, shall for ever cease, and an endless duration of unutterable bliss and glory commence. Amidst the applauding shouts of friendly angels, and the joyful congratulations of fellow-saints, your immortal spirit shall ascend to the mansions of the blessed. Jesus, the great Captain of your salvation, shall welcome you thither, and in the presence of that illustrious assembly, with his own lips pronounce you conqueror. "This is he who dared to enter the lists with the powers of darkness, maintained the fight amidst a thousand dangers, and has now won the prize. I saw him, bravely asserting the cause of God and truth, and resolutely contending with his own heart, the world, and the devil. I beheld him amidst the many vicissitudes of this short but painful warfare—sometimes almost borne down by ignorance and error, prejudice and passion, flattery and reproach, perplexing doubts and discouraging fears—and then, animated by a ray of divine hope, resuming fresh courage, and resolving, in the strength of God, to conquer or die. His silent reasonings I noticed. His sorrowful complaints I watched. His earnest cries I heard. The aid he implored was granted him. Out of weakness he became strong. He waxed valiant in fight. The armies of sin and death he put to flight. *Though faint, he pursued.* The last blow is now given. His warfare is accomplished. *Well done, good and faithful servant! enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.*" So shall he be arrayed with the robes that conquerors wear, and receive at the hands of Jesus, the righteous Judge, the palm of victory, and diadem of glory. And O! what rapturous joys will circulate around his heart, while he reflects on the dangers he has escaped, and remembers with infinite gratitude, that the victory, glorious as it is, is wholly to be ascribed to the blood of the Lamb! while he feels within, the satisfactions which result from a consciousness of perfect knowledge, purity and happiness! while he casts his eye around

him, upon the bright and numerous assembly to which he is united! and while he looks forward to a duration of felicity and glory which shall know no end!

And now say, Christian, Whether all these considerations have not a mighty effect to animate you to perseverance? Can you resist their united force?—the goodness of the cause—the seasonable and effectual support you may depend upon receiving—and the victory, the glorious victory, which shall crown the day. Be persuaded, therefore, *though faint, yet to pursue.*——

DISCOURSE XV.

RELIGION AN ABIDING PRINCIPLE.

PHIL. I. 6.—*Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you, will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.*

CONFIDENCE, in matters of a doubtful nature, is generally considered as an expression of great ignorance and folly. And with good reason—For if men were sensible of the weakness of their intellects, of the powerful influence of prejudice and passion, and of the various arts by which error too often insinuates itself into the mind; they would be cautious how they hastily pronounced upon either opinions or facts, where the evidence is at all defective. Yet, a modest diffidence of our own judgment will by no means justify scepticism, or a continual habit of doubting. There are some truths so plain and self-evident, that it would argue a criminal disaffection of the heart to them, as well as a most unreasonable incredulity, were we to withhold our assent. And there are others, which though not discoverable by the light of nature, yet being clearly laid down in scripture, we may be confident of their authenticity. And even these will admit of such an appeal to impartial reason, as serves

rather to strengthen than diminish their force. Men divinely inspired might, indeed, peremptorily demand the credit of their hearers to the doctrines and facts they reported to them, without entering into a particular explanation of them. Yet, we find both Christ and the apostles taking pains to establish the principles, upon which the truths they delivered were founded, in order thereby more fully to convince their disciples of the reasonableness and importance of such truths.

An instance of this we have in the passage just read. That spirit of discernment with which the apostle was endued, might perhaps have authorised him to pronounce confidently concerning the future state of the Philippians, and upon such issue he might have put the matter. He, however, does not rest the argument here; but enters into the principles and grounds of his confidence, which were in every view as level to their comprehensions and conviction as to his. With pleasure *he remembered their fellowship in the gospel*, that is, their holy, humble, exemplary behaviour, from the beginning of their profession until that time. From thence he clearly inferred the soundness of their conversion. And satisfied that their conversion was the work of God, he from this principle fairly concluded, that what God had thus begun he would in due time bring to perfection. This was a kind of reasoning obvious to the plainest understanding; and which may, I think, without the charge of rashness or undue confidence, be applied to the character and state of every real Christian. I propose, therefore, in discoursing of this subject, to consider more particularly,

I. What this important matter is, of which we may be confident concerning every man of true religion; and,

II. The grounds of this confidence.

I. As to the matter of which we may be confident, it is this —*That God will perform the good work he hath begun in the real Christian, until the day of Jesus Christ.*

Religion is manifestly the thing here intended. What that is we have largely considered in the preceding discourses. In order, however, to throw light on the subject we are now discussing, it will be proper to attend a while to the description given us of it in this passage.

1. It is *a work* wrought *in* the soul of man.

Now a work, of whatever kind it is, implies design, activity, and an exertion of skill and strength. Ideas which are applicable to religion in its rise, progress, and final completion; and more especially as it concerns the heart or inward man; for these this work is said to be wrought. We are his *workmanship*, says the apostle to the Ephesians *a*. The soul of man, in an unrenewed state, resembles a building in ruins. It was once a fair and beautiful temple, the residence of the blessed God, and sacred to his service. But alas! it is now defaced and spoiled. The stones of the sanctuary, to use the language of the prophet concerning the temple at Jerusalem, are poured out; the altar is thrown down; the holy fire extinguished; and the glory of the Lord departed. All the faculties of the mind are enervated and broken, overspread with darkness and error, and wretchedly polluted and depraved. The great object therefore of religion is the renovation of the soul, the rebuilding this temple, and the fitting it again for the service and enjoyment of God. A work this truly noble and important, but attended with much expence, labour and opposition. The plan is laid in the sacred records, and suitable means are provided for carrying it into execution. The materials are chosen, fashioned and cemented. And thus the building, fitly framed and beautified, groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord, and becomes an habitation of God through the Spirit. The foundation is laid in deep humiliation for sin, and a lively faith in the Lord Jesus Christ; and the superstructure is raised, amidst many conflicts and temptations, in knowledge, purity and joy. He who was ignorant of God, of his own heart, and of the great concerns of a future state, becomes wise unto salvation. He who was dead in trespasses and sins, is quickened to a life of holiness. And he who was immersed in the follies and pleasures of the world, aspires to infinitely nobler enjoyments. *He is a new creature.* There is a change in his principles, views, affections and manner of life. *Old things are passed away, and all things become new b.* Now,

2. Of this work *God is the author.* So the text expressly assures us. For he who had begun it in the Philippians, is the same divine person to whom the apostle had offered his thanks, in the third verse, on their behalf.

a Eph. ii. 10. *b* 2 Cor. v. 17.

Every house is built by some man, but he who builds this temple *is God.* To his skill and influence we are indebted both for framing the plan, and for carrying it into execution. Others indeed are *labourers together with God a;* nay those in whom the work is wrought, are themselves commanded *to work out their own salvation with fear and trembling b:* yet they all act under the direction of the great Master-builder, and depend upon the effectual concurrence of his providence and grace for the success of their labours.

After what manner the Holy Spirit exerts his influence on the minds of men, to effect their conversion at first, and to maintain and promote religion in their hearts afterwards, it is not for me precisely to determine. But that there is a supernatural power exerted to these great ends, may be clearly proved from the principles of reason, in concurrence with the express testimony of Scripture. This I have shewn at large in a former discourse. It will be necessary, however, to resume the argument here in a few words, because the main thing asserted in the text, *That this work shall be performed until the day of Christ,* very much depends upon it.

It is a truth acknowledged on all hands, that the great Father of spirits can have access to the hearts of men, and by a secret but powerful influence, incline and move them as he sees fit. To deny the possibility of this is to recur to downright atheism. Nor is it unworthy of God, or at all subversive of our original constitution as reasonable creatures, for that great and good Being thus to irradiate our benighted minds, and give a new bent to our depraved will and affections. Our present state evidently requires it in order to our becoming capable of serving and enjoying God: for it is a clear fact, that men are naturally averse to that which is holy, spiritual and good; and that all the means used to recover them to a sense of their duty and interest have been, and still are ineffectual with the far greater part of mankind. And as the influence of the Holy Spirit is necessary for the renovation of our nature, so this doctrine is clearly revealed in the Bible; and religion wherever it prevails is constantly and invariably represented throughout that sacred book, as an effect resulting from that cause. It is God

a 2 Cor. vi. 1, b Phil. ii. 12.

that *opens our eyes a, enlightens our understandings b,* and *directs our ways to keep his statutes c.* It is God that *circumcises our hearts to love him d, puts his fear in our inward parts e,* and *renews a right spirit within us f.* It is God that *works in us to will and to do of his good pleasure g,* and *makes us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light h.* We are *born of the Spirit i,* and *saved by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost k.* In fine, *we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to good works l.* All which, you see, well agrees with the language of the text, that *God begins* this work in us, *and performs it until the day of Christ.*

Whoever therefore duly reflects on the ruinous state to which the soul of man is reduced by sin; on the prodigious expence which the Son of God hath been at to procure on honourable terms the return of the Holy Spirit to our earth; on the means appointed for rebuilding, beautifying and consecrating a temple for his service; the sorrow, labour and difficulty which, through various causes, attend the work itself; and what Scripture, as you have seen, affirms concerning the divine influence therein: whoever, I say, duly considers all these things must acknowledge that religion is indeed the work of God.—Which leads me to observe,

3. That it is *a good* work. So it must needs be, as it is the effect of divine skill, power and goodness: but its nature and intendment will sufficiently shew it.

Beauty and convenience are the two chief commendations of a building. If its parts are so framed and adjusted, as to please the beholder; and it is so contrived and laid out as to furnish all needful accommodations for the inhabitant: it is a fair mansion, an agreeable dwelling. In like manner, this spiritual building is both *ornamental* and *useful.* He who hath a taste for real dignity and beauty, must acknowledge that they are qualities inseparable from true religion. Figure to yourself a Christian, who possesses all that genuine simplicity, meekness, humility, cheerfulness, love of God, contempt of the world, and

a Psal. cxix. 18. *b* Eph. i. 18.—2 Cor. iv. 6. *c* Psal. cxix. 5.
d Deut. xxx. 6. *e* Jer. xxxii. 40. *f* Psal. li. 10.
g Phil. ii. 13. *h* Col. i. 12. *i* John iii. 5.
k Tit. iii. 5. *l* Eph. ii. 10.

benevolence towards his fellow-creatures, which the faith of the gospel inspires; and say, Whether such a character is not truly amiable? It cannot fail of captivating the eye, and charming the heart, of him whose senses are exercised to discern good and evil. Nay, it will, it must, it does, upon some occasions at least, command the reverence of the wicked themselves. *The king's daughter*, to use the figurative language of the psalmist, *is all glorious within; her clothing is of wrought gold* a.

And sure I am, religion is as *useful*, as it is venerable and ornamental. The personal benefits which result from it are great, innumerable and lasting. Not to speak of its effect to secure a man from many temporal evils, it tends directly, and in various ways, to promote the peace, comfort and happiness of the mind. *Great peace have they who love thy law*, says David b: *The ways of wisdom are ways of pleasantness*, says Solomon c. And the apostle assures us that *godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come* d. Not do they only in whom this work is wrought reap the fruits of it: others are benefited by it. The grace of God makes a man a good man. It inspires him with principles of integrity, meekness, humility and generosity; virtues these of general utility, and which cannot fail of rendering him who possesses them a blessing to all around him. So that the real Christian will be a dutiful and affectionate relation, a sincere and steady friend, and an honourable and useful member of society. These Philippians, in whom religion thus prevailed, were not only *blameless and harmless, the sons of God without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation*; but *they shone as lights in the world* e. And it is true of the disciples of Christ in every age, as well as of his immediate followers, that *they are the salt of the earth* f.—Now surely a work that is thus ornamental and useful must be a *good work*. Yet,

4. It is at present *imperfect*, a work *begun* in us.

As to some, little more can be said of them than that the foundation of this new building is just laid, and that there are hopeful appearances of its rising out of its former ruins. It is

a Psal. xlv. 13. b Psal. cxix. 165. c Prov. iii. 17.
d 1 Tim. iv. 8. e Chap. ii. 15. f Matt. v. 13.

the day of small things, as the prophet speaks concerning the temple at Jerusalem *a*. Their knowledge scarce extends farther than the first principles of the oracles of God, and is blended with much ignorance and error. Their ideas are irregular and confused, like his in the gospel who just emerging out of blindness said, *I see men as trees, walking b*. Their faith, though well grounded, is weak and feeble, and frequently shook with the violent assaults of temptation; so that in their perplexity they cry out, like him, who besought Christ to heal his child, *Lord, I believe; help thou my unbelief c*. Their hope, though it holds them up from despondency, arises not to assurance; so that they dare not pronounce certainly upon their state towards God. They have a fixed abhorrence of all sin; yet not thoroughly knowing their own hearts, and not fully comprehending the devices of Satan, they are often deceived, if not overcome, by its delusive and flattering appearance. They have a relish for the pure and spiritual pleasures of religion, and eagerly aspire after them; yet they feel and lament the powerful attractions and undue influence of sensible objects. In short, the principles of grace and holiness have many sinful habits and foolish passions to contend with; so that their joys are mingled with sorrows, their hopes clouded with fears, and their obedience disgraced with imperfection and sin.

Thus is religion in the beginning like Elijah's *cloud*, which at first was no bigger than a man's hand, but afterwards covered the whole heavens *d*. Or like *a grain of mustard-seed*, which is the least of all seeds, but when it is grown, is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree; so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof *e*. And hence our Saviour, in great compassion to his young afflicted disciples, compares them to *a bruised reed*, and *smoking flax f*. Like a bruised reed, they are in their own apprehension, most base and contemptible; and, through the sorrowfulness of their spirits, are as incapable of affording melody in the ears of others, as a musical instrument that is broken and laid aside. And like smoking flax, religion seems to them to have little strength or prevalence in their hearts; so that, though the fire may have

a Zech. iv. 10. *b* Mark viii. 24. *c* Mark ix. 24.
d 1 Kings xviii. 44, 45. *e* Matt. xiii. 31, 32. *f* Chap. xii. 20.

been smothered there for a long while, they can scarce think it will ever burst out into a living and inextinguishable flame.

And then as to Christians of longer standing and higher attainments in religion, even the work in them, when compared with the perfection it shall arrive at in heaven, is only in its beginning. You see the outlines of that fair original, after which they are a copy; but though the resemblance is striking, the picture is rude and unfinished. The superstructure is raised perhaps to a considerable height, yet there are many blemishes in the building: nay, there is wood, hay and stubble, mingled with the very materials of which it is composed. Original corruptions, evil habits, and early prejudices are so deeply rooted, that they are not to be totally eradicated by age, experience, the instructions of God's word, or the discipline of his providence. And hence those many sad and strange appearances among good men, those errors in judgment, and mistakes in conduct, which try their charity towards each other, and sometimes prove an occasion of offence and scandal to the world. A reflection this, which gives rise to many sorrowful lamentations, in the breast of him who truly fears God, and at certain seasons excites vehement desires after a dismission hence.—The work however,

5. Is a *progressive* work. This, the phrase of its being performed *until* the day of Christ, clearly intimates.

God, as we have seen, is the author of it; and it is scarce probable, that so able and skilful an architect should begin a building, and then suspend all concern about it, till just the period when it is to be finished. In some instances, indeed, it looks as if this were the case. So it appears to the Christian himself, when God withholds the light of his countenance, and suffers him to walk in darkness. But however difficult it may be, at such seasons, to persuade ourselves that religion is in an improving state, yet so it really is. The work is advancing with perhaps swifter progress, amidst these dark and gloomy experiences, than when to our view it goes on smoothly and prosperously. For however desirable the comforts of divine grace are, the great object of religion is the subduing our corruptions, and the forming our hearts to love and obedience. And if God is pursuing this object by afflictive dispensations, as he most cer-

tainly is, then is he carrying on the good work, though it may seem to us as if it stood still, or as if it were never begun. Nay, he is attentive to it, (such is his goodness!) even amidst all that languor and indifference, which sometimes seize on the Christian, and disgrace his profession. For though, at such a time, religion may be said to be on the decline, and we are ourselves chargeable with great ingratitude and folly, yet God can and will over-rule all that bitterness and sorrow, which are the fruit of such criminal neglects, to the great purpose of reviving again the dying interests of godliness in our hearts. And it is both instructive and pleasing to reflect, how admirably he hath in many cases directed the dispensations of his providence, and the influences of his grace, to this truly important end.

These instances however excepted, their progress in the divine life is obvious to Christians themselves, or at least to every attentive observer of their temper and conduct. As they advance in their profession, they usually improve in knowledge, purity and comfort. They have juster conceptions of divine truths, and are more thoroughly confirmed in their belief of them. Their aversion to sin and love of holiness increase. Their discouraging fears subside, and they become more satisfied as to their state towards God. And the effects of such improvement appear in the course of their lives. Amidst the cultivations of providence and grace, they grow and bring forth fruit. They *add* to their *faith, virtue; to virtue, knowledge; to knowledge, temperance; to temperance, patience; to patience, godliness; to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, charity a.* Such, I say, is the fact with respect to many Christians. So that they who in the beginning were *feeble*, become *as David; and* they who are of *the house of David, as the angel of the Lord b.* This gradual progress of religion in the heart, is described in Scripture by a great variety of figures, taken from the springing of the vegetable creation, from the growth of children, and from the improvement of scholars under the tuition of their masters. To this purpose we are assured, that *they who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength, shall mount up with wings as eagles, shall run and not be weary, and walk and not faint c:* That *they who are*

a 2 Pet. i. 5—7. b Zech. xii. 8. c Isa. xl. 31.

planted in the house of the Lord, shall flourish in the courts of our God; that they shall bring forth fruit in old age a: and, in a word, that *the path of the just is as the shining light, which shineth more and more unto the perfect day b.*—Which leads me to the last and principal thing to be considered, and that is,

6. That this work shall be brought to *perfection* at *the day of Jesus Christ.*

By *the day of Christ* in the New Testament, is most commonly intended, the last great day, when Christ shall come to judge the world; and which the apostle, in another place, emphatically styles, *that day c.* And it will be a glorious and tremendous day indeed! a day distinguished by events of the most interesting nature, and in which every individual of the human race will be intimately concerned. On the morning of that day, the great archangel shall sound his trumpet, the dead shall arise, the Son of God shall appear in the heavens with a radiance surpassing the sun, myriads of blessed spirits shall attend his descent, the throne shall be set, small and great shall stand before it, and each having received his final doom, the world and all that is therein, shall pass away and be no more. How solemn and to the righteous how joyful a scene this.—Now, though this is not the day to which the apostle seems here to refer; because the work which God hath begun *in* us is a work which respects the soul, and which will therefore, as there is an intermediate state, be perfected at death: though, I say, this is not the day here intended, yet an event will then take place in which the happiness of the Christian is nearly concerned, and which therefore I cannot forbear mentioning; I mean the change that will pass upon the body, by which it will be fitted for the reception of the immortal spirit. A work this which will exhibit to our admiring eyes a most amazing display of divine skill and power. *Christ the Saviour*, says the apostle, *shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself d.*

But it is the day of the Christian's death, as I said, that seems to be here intended. And that may very properly be called *the*

a Psal. xcii. 13, 14.
b Prov. iv. 18.
c 2 Tim. i. 12. ἐκείνην τὴν ἡμέραν.
d Phil. iii. 21.

day of Christ, because Christ, to use his own words, then *comes to receive* his people *to himself, that where he is there they may be also a.* When the union between soul and body is dissolved, the spirit returns to him who gave it, and joins the society of the blessed. Now, at that happy moment, God will of his mercy, *finish*, *accomplish* or *perfect* this good work of which I have been discoursing, as the word here used is elsewhere rendered *b.* He who began it will then put the last hand to it: 'he will bring forth the head stone with shoutings, crying, Grace, grace, unto it *c.*' So the apostle speaks of *the spirits of just men* being *made perfect d.*

Glory is the consummation of grace, or religion in its most improved and perfect state. An idea this of the happiness of heaven, the most clear and satisfactory perhaps of any we can frame of it in the present life. For however difficult it may be to conceive of the manner of our existence in that world, and of the external circumstances that will contribute to our felicity, not having powers equal to the investigation of subjects so sublime and exalted; yet we can pretty easily, in our imagination, divest religion of the manifest imperfections which attend it in the present state: which done, we view it in its native splendour and glory, and so as it is possessed and enjoyed above. Now these imperfections are such as result from ignorance and error, impurity and sin, and of consequence inquietude and sorrow: but at death they shall all be done away. At the instant this day of Christ commences, the thick mists of pestilential darkness which just now enveloped the soul, and rendered it both unhealthy and unhappy, shall be dissipated and scattered; and the sun of righteousness shall pour into it pure and unutterable light, bliss and glory. *Now we know* only *in part*, and *see through a glass darkly*; nor can it be otherwise at present, our intellects are so weak, there are so many obstructions to the right exercise of them, and the means of their information are so limited and imperfect. But 'then, we shall see face to face, and know even as we are known *e*;' behold divine truths in their just and proper light, and without the least mixture of weakness or error, of doubt or uncertainty. Now, strong as the propensities of

a John xiv. 3. *b* ἐπιτελέω. 2 Cor. viii. 6.—Heb. ix. 6.—2 Cor. vii. 1.
c Zech. iv. 7. *d* Heb. xii. 23. *e* 1 Cor. xiii. 9—12.

the heart may be to rectitude and holiness, they are continually thwarted and opposed by irregular inclinations and passions. But then, the full bias of the soul shall be to that which is good; nor shall it ever be warped or turned aside from its proper object, either by a principle of sin within, or by any kind of undue influence or temptation from without. Now, fear, disquietude and misery are the effects of ignorance, error and guilt. But then, the immortal spirit, irradiated with divine light and knowledge, and refined from all the impure dregs of sense and sin, shall enjoy the purest satisfactions, and the most ravishing pleasures—pleasures resulting from a full consciousness of the favour of God, and uninterrupted communion with the great Author of all excellence and perfection.

Thus shall this *good work*, begun in humiliation and sorrow, and carried on amidst great temptation and opposition, be at length finally completed in heaven. Thus shall this building, once in ruins, be restored to its ancient state, yea to a far greater degree of beauty and glory than ever. And O! who can describe the effect which this amazing display of divine skill and power shall have on the eye of every beholder?—the joy they will all feel at the dedication of this new temple?—and the transports of devotion and praise with which they will welcome the blessed God into it? *Lift up your heads, O ye gates, and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors, and the King of glory shall come in a.* So shall the King of glory come in, fill the house with the brightest beams of benignity and grace, and never, never more depart thence.

Thus have we seen what that important matter is, of which we may be assured concerning the Christian, *That God will perform the good work begun in him until the day of Jesus Christ.* And now I should go on to consider the grounds of our confidence upon this matter. But in the mean time it will be proper to bring home what hath been said to ourselves, by seriously enquiring whether God hath begun this good work in our hearts.

This is a question, Sirs, of infinite importance. For, if our depraved nature is not in a degree renewed in the present life, we have no authority, either from reason or Scripture, to ex-

a Psal. xxiv. 7.

pect that it shall attain to that perfection of happiness and glory I have been describing, in the future. Nay, we are assured by him who cannot lie, that *except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God* a. And then, a right knowledge of the state of our souls is of the utmost consequence, on the one hand, to prevent a most fatal and dangerous disappointment at last; and on the other, to secure us, if we are Christians, from those discouraging fears which not only tend to make us unhappy, but to obstruct our improvement in the divine life. Let us therefore examine ourselves with great seriousness and impartiality; and, at the same time, with all that tenderness and charity, which both the word of God, and the unavoidable imperfection of the present state, abundantly warrant.

If, then, this good work is begun in us, it will be the main object of our attention. Such is its importance, and so immediately does it affect the mind and heart, that it is not conceivable how it should have any existence in that man, who is little, if at all, thoughtful and solicitous about it. On the contrary, if we have a lively sense of its infinite utility, and indispensable necessity; if we clearly give it the preference to any other concern whatever; if we are above all things anxious, lest we should be deceived in the opinion we form of ourselves; and if, in a word, our hopes and fears, our joys and sorrows, our pleasures and pains, are chiefly affected by this important question, Whether we are interested in the favour of God, and bear any resemblance to his image? it may from hence be fairly concluded that this work is begun in us.

We shall be sensible also, in this case, of the difficulties that attend it. Too many there are who look upon religion as a very easy attainment, and taking it for granted that it is in their power, at any time, and upon the shortest notice, to make their peace with God, and prepare for heaven, they trouble themselves very little, for the present, about their souls and a future world. But if we have entered into the spirit of divine things, we shall form very different conceptions of the matter. It will strike us as a most arduous, as well as important concern; nay it is possible that the obstructions it may have met with in our breasts from numerous and powerful corruptions, and from various and

a John iii. 3.

mighty temptations, may have led us sometimes to fear, that though it is a most desirable blessing, yet it is scarce attainable. A deep and affecting sense, however, of these difficulties, arising thus from an intimate acquaintance with our own hearts, furnishes a clear proof that this work is begun in us.

And then, as a lively apprehension of these difficulties will naturally put us upon looking for superior assistance, so a serious and affectionate regard to the Holy Spirit, as the author of this work, is a farther evidence of its existence. *There is no man*, saith our Saviour, *who shall do a miracle in my name, that can lightly speak evil of me a.* In like manner it may be affirmed, that no man whose heart is renewed by a divine influence, can speak lightly of that influence. Whilst, therefore, a contemptuous treatment of the Holy Spirit, and indeed a total indifference to his gracious operations, afford a sad proof that men are utter strangers to the power of religion; the reverse may be reasonably concluded of all those, who not only give firm credit to this leading doctrine of divine revelation, but are deeply sensible of its utility and importance, and make it their frequent and earnest request to Heaven, that they may experience these influences.

Again, as Christ is the foundation on which this building is raised, the corner-stone on which the hope of the good man entirely rests; and as faith in him is a powerful, and indeed only effectual mean of uniting us to God, and quickening us to obedience, so a suitable regard to the person, doctrine, and grace of this Almighty Saviour, is another plain and natural criterion of the reality and prevalence of religion in our hearts. 'To you that believe,' says the apostle Peter, 'he is precious *b*.' And the apostle John mentions 'our confessing that Jesus is the Son of God,' (a phrase which imports our confidence in him, and ready consent to the gracious proposals of salvation by him) as a proof that 'God dwelleth in us, and we in God *c*.'

He in whom this work is begun, will also be fearful of every thing which hath, in his apprehension, a tendency to prevent its progress. A temper this, of which Christians usually give very striking proofs in the early part of their profession. Next to the direct indulgence of sin, there is nothing which has a

a Mark ix. 39. *b* 1 Pet. ii. 7. *c* 1 John iv. 15.

more natural effect to weaken the vital powers of religion, than a heedless desultory behaviour, a wanton conformity to the manners of the world, and an unnecessary connection with vain and wicked men. Tenderness, therefore, of conscience, a quick sensibility to the first approaches of temptation, and a dread of grieving the Holy Spirit, are noble proofs of the reality of internal religion.

As is also a serious attention to those means by which this work is usually begun and carried on. He who is alive towards God, will have his ear open to receive instruction from the voice of providence, and the ministry of the word; nor can he live in the utter neglect of the several private and social duties of worship, no, nor content himself with the mere formal discharge of such duties, without entering into the spirit of them.

He will also feel an affection for those in whom he believes this work is wrought, esteeming them the excellent of the earth, and accounting them brethren in Christ, and fellow-heirs of eternal life. Nor can he be wholly destitute of a concern for others, especially his friends and relations, that they may be partakers with him, of the infinitely rich and invaluable gifts of divine grace.—In fine, he will give proof of the genuineness of his religion, in his life and conversation, the general course of which, allowing for the unavoidable imperfections of the present state, will be honourable, useful, and exemplary.

And now, *Is* this *good work begun in you*, Christian? Let me congratulate you on your unspeakable felicity; and earnestly exhort you to be thankful to the great Author of it, to express your gratitude by labouring heartily with him in the work, and to comfort yourself with the assurance in the text, that *he will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.*—Are you still doubtful about it? Let me exhort you to add prayer to self-examination, and most fervently to beseech God to give you a right understanding of the state of your soul, that you may not, on the one hand, perplex yourself with unreasonable and groundless fears, nor on the other, flatter yourself with vain and presumptuous hopes.—But, is it a clear point that you have hitherto been an utter stranger to real, vital, practical religion? Let me in one word express the pity I feel for you in this your

miserable state, and my earnest wishes, that, sensible of your danger, you may flee from the wrath that is to come, lay hold on eternal life, and become a happy partaker of all the rich pleasures of religion here, and of the unutterable joys with which it shall be crowned hereafter.

PART II.

THE import of the text, *that God will perform the good work he hath begun in the Christian until the day of Jesus Christ;* hath been considered. And I come now,

II. To lay before you the grounds of our *confidence* respecting this matter; or, in other words, the principles whence it may may be certainly concluded, that religion, if it be genuine, shall prevail over all opposition, till at length it is perfected in eternal glory.—"If it be genuine," I say, because it is real religion only that is the subject of our present consideration; and not the mere semblance or external profession of it.—And I add, "that it shall prevail over all opposition," because it does meet with opposition in the best of men, and of consequence, sometimes assumes an appearance very unpromising, and which threatens its final dissolution.

Now the question thus stated, is highly interesting and important, as the very earnest and emphatical manner in which the apostle expresses himself, clearly intimates—Being confident, says he, of *this very thing a.* And it is capable of such proof as will warrant a firm persuasion of it. For if it be admitted, (and I think the plain and obvious sense of the words requires it,) that the apostle's confidence did not arise, merely from some private assurance he might have received from Heaven respecting the Philippians, but from the nature of the work itself, and the divine influence in it; it follows that his reasoning is equally applicable to all real Christians, of whom it may likewise be affirmed that God hath begun a good work in them. And it is remarkable that he adds in the next verse, *Even as it is meet for me to think this of you all b.*

This view therefore of the matter will naturally lead us into these two enquiries,

a Αυτὸ τοῦτο.

b φρονεῖν. Hic dicitur non de animi affectu, sed de mentis judicio.—BEZA.

I. How far it may be presumed from the nature of religion itself, that it is an abiding principle? And,

II. Which is the main consideration, What grounds we have to conclude, that God will exert his influence for the preservation of it?

There is some analogy between this argument and that of the immortality of the soul. From the nature of the soul, which is spiritual, and, so far as we can discover, hath no seeds or principles of dissolution in it like the body; it should seem to have been designed for eternal duration. Yet, as no creature is independent of the Creator, it is evident that the continuation of its existence must be the result of the will and influence of the first great cause of all things. Since therefore the light of nature could afford no positive proof of the immortality of the soul, there was great need of a revelation from God to decide the question; which accordingly Scripture hath done. In like manner, it should seem highly probable from the nature of religion, that it is an abiding principle, or such a qualification or endowment of the mind as will never be entirely annihilated and lost. Yet, as its preservation depends upon a continued exertion of that energy which first gave it existence, we must have recourse to the word of God for that assurance respecting this matter which its importance requires.—Let us then begin,

I. With enquiring, How far it may be presumed from the nature of religion itself, that it is an abiding principle?

Now, if religion consisted only in faint and general speculations of the mind, which have at best but a casual and transient influence on a man's temper and conduct; it were not to be wondered that its continuance should be doubtful and precarious. We see things at one time in a very different light from that in which we view them at another. Our passions are variously moved and affected. And of consequence, our actions thus guided and influenced, are inconstant and irregular. But, in that heart which is really renewed by the grace of God, there is a steady belief of the great leading truths of religion, a deep sense of their importance, a fixed abhorrence of all sin, a prevailing desire to please God, and an habitual preference of the comforts and hopes, which spring from the divine favour, to any other enjoyments whatever. Now is it probable, this being the state

of the mind, that there should ever be a total revolution in it? such a revolution, as that from a full assurance of the plainest truths, a man should degenerate into downright scepticism or infidelity? from a deep and weighty conviction of the vast importance of his everlasting interests, he should come to consider them of very trifling consequence? from an ardent concern to approve himself to God, he should not only sink into sloth and indifference, but be filled with bitterness and enmity against that great and good Being? and in fine, that instead of retaining the relish and savour he once had for the pure and substantial pleasures of religion, he should contract an utter antipathy to them? Is this I say probable?

It is easy to see how the faith of a Christian may be shook by the sudden assaults of temptation, and by unexpected and surprising events of life; but how the very seeds of it should be totally eradicated and destroyed, is hard to imagine. It is easy to see how the cares of the world may operate to divert his attention for a while from the great objects of religion; but how that deep impression of their importance, which had penetrated his very heart, should be entirely effaced, is very difficult to be apprehended. It is easy to see how sin, by assuming false appearances, may surprise and captivate the good man; but how he should quietly yield to the oppression of a tyrant he hath so much abhorred and dreaded, is most unaccountable. The lively and vigorous acts of love to God, may also through various causes be suspended; but how is it imaginable, that a heart impregnated with this divine principle, should be susceptible of, or at least be inclined to admit malevolent and traitorous sentiments and affections towards that most lovely of all Beings—such dispositions as constitute the characters of ungodly men? Nor is it scarcely a supposable case, that he who hath tasted the refined pleasures of communion with God, and the hope of a better world, should deliberately, and with the full consent of his mind, renounce them all for the perishing enjoyments of time and sense.

The matter may be illustrated by instances somewhat similar. Taste and genius, natural temper, early prejudices, and vicious habits, are rarely altered, and never without the greatest difficulty overcome: so that with respect to these things, most men

carry the same complexion with them all through life: what they were in the beginning they in the main continue to be to the last. We should look upon it as a strange phænomenon, to see one who had discovered an early thirst for knowledge, become averse to intellectual improvements—a man of a sweet, easy, natural temper, become morose and obstinate—or he who had been remarkable for his simplicity and integrity, become crafty and fraudulent. How improbable is it then that religion, which if it be genuine must have taken fast hold on the heart, and mingled itself with the vital principles of the soul, should be torn thence by surrounding temptations, or fall an entire sacrifice to opposing passions and corruptions? The heathens themselves entered so far into the spirit of this reasoning, respecting the habits of virtue and morality, that we sometimes hear them making their boast of their philosophers and great men, that you might as soon divert the sun from his course, as turn them from the practice of truth and righteousness.

But if we farther consider, to what the operations of religion do in their own nature tend, or the respect they have to some future attainment, or state of perfection; it should from thence also seem that it is an abiding principle. We cannot think of *seed* sown in the ground, without annexing the idea of its expanding, springing up, and at length arriving to maturity, and producing its own proper fruit. The idea of *childhood* hath a manifest relation to manhood, so that, according to the common course of things, it is expected an infant will grow to the stature of a man, and that reason will gradually improve and strengthen, till it ripens into that state in which it usually appears at full age. A *work begun* is a relative phrase, and hath no meaning in it, if not considered in reference to that perfection which was originally designed and planned. Now, though in each of these instances it is possible the end may not be attained,—the *seed* may perish in the ground—the *child* may die in its infancy—and the *work* may not be finished; yet such events are unnatural, and to be ascribed rather to some positive external influence, than to any immediate tendency, in the things themselves to dissolution. In like manner, may it not be reasonably presumed from the nature of religion, which is frequently thus described, that it will abide till it arrive at a state

of perfection in eternal glory? To this state its principles, powers and operations manifestly tend: so that if it were really dissolved and lost, its proper end would not be attained; nor could this happen, but from some force superior to that which it hath in itself. And in such case it might be said of it, as of the death of an infant or a young plant, that its dissolution was untimely and unnatural. As to the question, What ground we have to conclude that no such external force shall prevail to its total destruction? *that* will come to be considered afterwards.

In the mean while let me observe, that this high probability, arising from the nature of religion, that it is an *abiding principle*; is confirmed by correspondent descriptions given us of it in Scripture. And indeed these descriptions of it are so full and clear, that I think from them the certainty of its continuance may be fairly proved.——The Christian is said *to have eternal life a*, which may be well explained, not only of his being entitled to future happiness, but of his having the seeds of the divine life in him: since it is elsewhere declared that *he hath eternal life abiding in him*, and *that he dwelleth in God and God in him b*. And what words can more fully and strongly express the truth I have been establishing? Religion is a *living* principle; that principle is in its own nature *eternal*; and it *abideth, dwelleth*, continueth in him who hath it. Our Saviour not only speaks of it as *living water*, but assures us, that 'this water shall be in him to whom he gives it, a well of water springing up into everlasting life *c*.' The well may be deep, and difficult to be come at; nay it may for a while be stopped up, covered with earth, and the surface of it so disguised as that it can hardly be known where it is; yet the spring abides, and hath such force in it as again to work its way through every obstruction, till at length it rises into everlasting life *d*.—This notion of religion is also farther confirmed by what our Saviour says of the effect, which the water of life produces in those who drink it. *They shall never thirst e*; that is, it shall so far subdue their eager desire of earthly things, as that *that* desire shall no more be the ruling predominant passion in their breasts.—With this account of the matter agrees likewise the metaphorical language of the

a John iii. 36. *b* 1 John iii. 15. iv. 16. *c* John iv. 14.
d Shaw's Emmanuel. *e* John iv. 14.

apostle John, who describes it as *the anointing which* Christians *have received of God a.* He alludes to the ancient ceremony of unction, used at the inauguration of kings and priests; and which was designed to express, not only their investiture with those offices, but their qualifications for them by the descent of the Spirit upon them. In like manner, the grace of God is that holy oil, that rich perfume poured upon Christians, by which they are not only devoted to, but prepared and qualified for the duties of their sacred profession. And this anointing *abideth in them*; it so mingles itself with the powers and affections of the soul, as that the fragrant odour is never to be wholly dissipated and lost.—To which I will add, that as the Christian is said to be born of God, so we are assured that *his seed remaineth in him b*; which is clearly to be understood of that new nature, spirit and temper communicated to him, and which however it may sometimes be enfeebled and weakened, yet retains such force and energy in it as to prevent his *committing sin*, that is, gross sins, or however his perpetrating them with deliberation and consent, and for a continuance, as is the character and practice of wicked men.

And now from the nature of religion, as it thus stands described in Scripture, we may I think with confidence presume that it is an *abiding principle*. And so I am led to enquire,

II. What grounds we have to conclude that God will exert his influence for the preserving and bringing it to perfection?

Here you see the question is changed from the natural incorruptibility of religion, to the care that God will take of it. For it is a possible thing that *that* which is in its own nature immortal, I mean, hath not in itself any seed or principle of dissolution, may yet be destroyed by some superior external force; and that *that* which is capable of a farther degree of perfection, may through the want of an external concurring influence, fail of the end for which it was formed. The soul, for instance, having no principle of corruption in itself like the body, may be said to be naturally immortal: yet surely that almighty power which created the soul, or any power superior to it, if God permit, may put an end to its existence. And so the seed sown in the ground, though it hath in it the stamina or first princi-

a 1 John ii. 27. b 1 John iii. 9.

ples of all that perfection proper to its particular species; yet if the heat and moisture which the sun and rain afford, are withheld, it will remain in its present state, and not attain to that maturity, with a view to which it was originally created. In the same manner we may reason as to religion. Though it is in its own proper nature incorruptible, it being the seed or beginning of eternal life; yet it is not independent of God, and therefore if he withdraws his support and influence, it may, it will be overpowered and destroyed by temptation and sin. And though it is capable of higher and nobler attainments, and naturally aspires to them; yet if the necessary means of such attainments are withheld, it can never arrive to its proper state of maturity. From whence it follows that *that* divine energy which first gave it existence must be farther exerted in order to its preservation and final perfection. And indeed the necessity of this is evidently implied in those passages, which speak of Christians being *kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation a*; and of their being *made meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light b.*

Let us then enquire, What ground we have to expect that such an influence will be exerted in favour of the real Christian? —The real Christian, I say, because the enquiry respects him only, and not the mere nominal professor. Now the matter may, I think, be rested upon the two plain arguments the text suggests, and which therefore we will briefly consider—*That God hath begun a good work in the Christian, and therefore will finish it*—And *that he hath expressly promised he will finish it*: for what here follows in the way of an inference or conclusion, may be considered as a positive declaration of his gracious intention respecting this matter, and hath the concurrent support of many other promises of the like import.

First, *God hath begun a good work in the Christian, and therefore* it may be naturally concluded he *will finish it.*

So we commonly reason in regard of the conduct of men, and upon affairs of very trifling consequence in comparison with that of which we are here discoursing. If I see a large and fair building rising into existence, as I shall not doubt that there is some one who hath laid the plan, and undertaken to execute it;

a 1. Pet. i. 5. *b* Col. i. 12.

so from the character of the architect, from the extensiveness of the plan, from the expence he hath been at to provide materials for the work, and, in fine, from his having begun it, and made some progress in it, I shall certainly infer, that he will by and by bring it to perfection. For, as our Lord says, *Which of you intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it? lest haply, after he hath laid the foundation, and is not able to finish it, all that behold him begin to mock him, saying, This man began to build, and was not able to finish a.* How very incredible is it then, that the blessed God should frame a design of such infinite utility and importance, as that of recovering sinners from their apostacy, and preparing them for the fruition of himself in heaven; that he should, at so vast an expence, provide the necessary means to this great end; that through the influence of his grace these means should take effect upon their hearts, and the outlines of their future perfect character should appear in their tempers and lives; and yet that he should, after all, withhold such farther degrees of grace, as are requisite to secure them from the violence of sin and temptation, and to bring this good work, which he had himself begun, to the desired perfection?

God is, we know, infinitely wise and all-powerful. Wherefore we may be assured, that whatever plan he lays, it is adjusted in such a manner, and the execution of it receives such continual support from himself, that it cannot fail of taking effect. 'He knoweth the end from the beginning *b*,' and 'worketh all things after the counsel of his own will *c*.'—This great business of forming an immortal mind for the exalted duties and pleasures of religion here, and for a perfection of happiness and glory hereafter, is evidently the work of God, as hath been already shewn.—It is a work every way worthy of that great Being, and when completed, will afford one of the most striking displays of his power and goodness.—Its importance far exceeds that of any other concern whatever; and the happiness not only of the good man himself, but of multitudes besides, is affected thereby.—Those in whom it is wrought, are represented in Scripture as the objects of the divine choice and affection; *a chosen generation, a peculiar people*, such *whom he hath formed for*

a Luke xiv. 28—30. *b* Isa. xlvi. 10. *c* Eph. i. 11.

himself, and *who love him, because he first loved them a.* And what deserves our particular consideration is, that the measures infinite wisdom hath taken, in order to open the way for this display of Almighty power and goodness, are most expensive, and such as may naturally lead us to conclude that the event is the special object of his attention and regard. Let us, in a few words, enter into this last idea, though indeed it comprehends in it so many important truths, that it cannot be fully discussed here.

It is not merely by an act of the divine will that apostate men are recovered and saved. Something farther is necessary. The rights of God's law and government must be asserted and maintained, and provision made upon equitable considerations for the exertion of that influence, by which they who are to be finally happy may be qualified for the participation of that happiness. To these ends the Son of God becomes incarnate, suffers the pains of death in their stead, arises from the dead, ascends up into heaven, and there ever lives to make intercession for them. So are they redeemed by his blood, accepted in him, and given to him as the reward of his sufferings *b.* And so is he constituted their living head, entrusted with all the rich blessings of grace designed to be bestowed upon them, and appointed the grand medium for the communication of the Holy Spirit, to whose influence this good work, of which I have been discoursing, is more immediately attributed *c.*

And now, who that considers all these things, the plan laid in the counsels of Heaven, for the redemption and salvation of sinners, the dignity of our Saviour's character, the value of his precious blood, the victory he hath obtained over the powers of darkness, the prevalency of his intercession, the authority he exercises over the universe, the special care and affection which he assures us he hath for his faithful people, the influence which, through his mediation, is exerted for the renovation of their hearts, and the wise ordering all the affairs of life, even the minutest of them, so as best to contribute to their real welfare; who, I say, that duly weighs all these things, but must

a 1 Pet. ii. 9.—Isa. xliii. 21.—1 John iv. 19.
b Acts xx. 28.—1 Pet. i. 18, 19.—Eph. i. 6.—Isa. liii. 10—12.
c Eph. iv. 15, 16.—Col. i. 18, 19.—John i. 16. xvi. 7.—Tit. iii. 5, 6.

join issue with the apostle in his conclusion, 'That he who hath begun a good work in the Christian, will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ?'—But it is yet farther to be remembered,

SECONDLY, That *God hath expressly declared he will finish it*; for what here follows, in the way of an inference or conclusion, may be considered as a positive assurance of his gracious purpose and resolution.

The apostle was confident as to the Philippians, that God would complete what he had begun in them; and as he argued from the soundest principles, so he could not (especially as he was divinely inspired) be mistaken in his conclusion; his sentence must needs be decisive. Nor can it reasonably be doubted, that what he affirms with respect to them, is equally applicable to all those whose characters are similar to theirs; that is, such who are *saints in Christ Jesus*—who have *fellowship in the* gospel, whose *love abounds in knowledge, and in all judgment*, who approve the *things that are excellent, are sincere*—and bring forth *the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ unto the glory and praise of God a*. Since, therefore it is a general and positive assertion, which concerns all real Christians, it may well be admitted as a ground of confidence with respect to such persons.

Here I might recite a great many passages of Scripture, which speak the same language with the text. But I shall confine myself to a few only, which, if taken in their natural, easy, and plain intendment, cannot methinks fail of both illustrating and explaining the matter we have been considering. Not to insist, therefore, on those Scriptures which declare the necessary connection between faith and salvation; as where our Saviour assures us, That *he who believes shall be saved*, and *shall never die b*:—Those which describe the natural progress of religion, from its first rise to its final perfection; as where the wise man says, *The path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day c*; and Job, *The righteous shall hold on his way, and he that hath clean hands shall be stronger and stronger d*:—Those which speak of *God's making an ever-*

a Ver. 1, 3, 9—11.
b Mark xvi. 16.—John xi. 26.
c Prov. iv. 18.
d Job xvii. 9.

lasting covenant with his people, not to turn away from them to do them good; and of his *putting his fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from him a*:—And those many other passages which assure us, That God *knows them that are his*, that he *keeps them by his power through faith unto salvation*, that they are *preserved in Christ*, and, in a word, that his continued life, mediation, and intercession, are the grounds of their hope of attaining to eternal happiness *b*.—Not, I say, to insist on these Scriptures, it will suffice briefly to illustrate a few others, which cannot methinks, without offering an unnatural violence to them, be understood in any other sense than that affixed to the text.

In that remarkable passage of the prophet Isaiah, which foretels the gentleness of our Saviour's administration, and its prevalence, notwithstanding, over all opposition, there is such a description given of his kind and condescending regards to the weakest of his people, and to those in whom the first symptoms of real religion appear, as strongly expresses his resolution to finish the good work, wherever his grace hath begun it. 'A bruised reed shall he not break, and smoking flax shall he not quench, till he send forth judgment unto victory *c*." "Be the condition of his faithful disciples ever so mean and despicable, or the discouragements they meet with in their Christian course ever so numerous and powerful, instead of rejecting and forsaking them, he will effectually support and strengthen them, till he make the cause of righteousness and truth completely victorious."—When our Lord, in the character of a shepherd, would express his affection for the sheep, and his resolution to guard them from the assaults of Satan the devouring lion, and of every adversary who would deprive them of that *eternal life* he gives them; he solemnly declares, 'They shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand.'—And he adds, 'My Father who gave them me, is greater than all, and none is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand *d*.' So that the care and tenderness of Christ the Mediator, and the almighty power of his Father, who hath given them to him that he might

a Jer. xxxii. 40.
b 2 Tim. ii. 19.—1 Pet. i. 5.—Jude 1.—John xiv. 19.—Heb. vii. 25.
c Matt. xii. 20. *d* John x. 28, 29.

redeem them with his blood, are united for their continual protection and final salvation.—To the same purpose the apostle speaks, when, having comforted the Romans and himself, amidst all their sufferings in the cause of religion, with the prospect of a certain and glorious victory through him that had loved them, he adds, 'For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord *a*. As if he had said, "I may well be allowed to triumph even in the midst of the combat, since I am confident, that neither the dread of death, arrayed in all the terrors that persecution can devise; nor the desire of life, excited by every imaginable prospect of worldly wealth and pleasure; nor the united opposition of infernal spirits, whatever rank they may hold, and how furious soever their rage may be; nor events present or future, be they what they may; nor the height of prosperity, nor the depth of adversity; nor any other creature throughout the universe; shall be able to separate any of us, who are Christians indeed, from the love of God, which he hath given us in Christ Jesus, and which is so secured to us in him, as that it shall never be lost."—The general reflection also which the apostle John makes upon the apostacy of some in those early times, who pretended they were Christians, when they really were not such, falls in clearly with the point we have been establishing, 'If they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us *b*.' "If with us they had entered into the spirit of the gospel, and felt the inward power of it upon their hearts, they would doubtless have still adhered to us. Their views being sincere and upright, they would have seen no cause to forsake us, and the grace of God would have secured them from the temptations to which they stood exposed. It hath, however, so happened, *that they might be made manifest* what they really are, and that their fall might prove a warning to others; *because* hereby it appears, that *not all* who are with us in the profession of the gospel, *are* indeed of *our* number, as true and genuine Christians. *But ye have an unction from the Holy One, and* ye know all things; that is, Ye have

a Rom. viii. 38, 39. *b* 1 John ii. 19, 20.

such an anointing of the Holy Spirit, and such an experimental acquaintance with all the essential truths of Christianity, as will effectually prevent your falling into those snares, which have proved fatal to these unhappy apostates."—Nor can I forget to mention the remarkable promise made originally to Joshua, and which most certainly belongs to all the people of God, as appears from the manner of its application in the epistle to the Hebrews; 'I will not, I will not leave thee, I will never, never, never forsake thee:' for such is the emphasis of the original *a*. Language this, which conveys a strong idea of the immutability of the divine love; and as it is designed to encourage our confidence in God's readiness to assist us on all occasions, and amidst the greatest difficulties and temptations, so adds no small weight to the general argument.

On these considerations then, may we rest our firm persuasion, "That God will perform the good work he hath begun in every real Christian."

And now to close the whole. Let me remind you, Christians, of your infinite obligations to the grace of God. You cannot be enough thankful. The foundation of your hope is laid in grace; the superstructure is raised by grace; and *the top-stone will* at length *be brought with shoutings, crying, Grace, grace unto it.*—And having substantial reason to conclude that you are Christians indeed, if what hath been said is true, you have surely all imaginable cause for cheerfulness and joy, as well as gratitude and praise.—Nor will this doctrine, if rightly understood, prove an occasion of sloth and indifference to an ingenuous mind: on the contrary, instead of relaxing, it will strengthen the nerves of the soul, and mightily quicken and invigorate the Christian in his course of duty.—And as to those who are disposed to turn the grace of God into licentiousness, it is sufficient to observe, that the remotest expression of such a temper may justly authorise a strong presumption, that God hath not begun a good work in that man's heart; and that, therefore, the hopes with which such an one flatters himself, are vain and groundless. But I am persuaded better things of you, brethren, and things which accompany salvation.

a Heb. xiii. 5. Οὐ μή σε ἀνῶ, οὐδ' οὐ μή σε ἐγκαταλίπω.

DISCOURSE XVI.

THE USE OF RELIGION IN DEATH.

PSALM XXIII. 4.—*Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for thou art with me, thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.*

OF the many arguments that may be urged in favour of religion, its usefulness in death is not the least. Nay this is an argument of such weighty consideration, that it might well demand our most serious attention, even though all idea of the advantages which at present result from religion were held entirely out of view. For where is the man who would not be glad to find himself in possession of something that will administer comfort to his heart, when all the resources of nature fail, and he is just upon the point of launching into an unknown and eternal world? Yea, there is scarce a man in the midst of life, be he ever so much intoxicated with its pleasures, who, while his thoughts are by some circumstance turned upon death, doth not secretly envy the Christian of those hopes and joys which religion alone inspires. He may dislike religion itself, but to its utility at such a time, his conscience cannot forbear yielding this testimony. Balaam was a wicked man, yet he spoke the sense of his heart when he said, *Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his a.* And if a glance only at death will force an acknowledgment of this sort from the lips of men of profligate lives, what advantage may we not hope will result from a steady contemplation of it? As such a realizing prospect of our final dissolution would not fail to plead strongly in favour of the truth and importance of religion, so, it is probable, it would prove a powerful mean, with the blessing of God, of conciliating our hearts to that great event. With this view I propose now to discourse particularly of death.

a Num. xxiii. 10.

And how great will be my happiness, if, while I am describing its terrors on the one hand, and that effectual antidote which the grace of God hath provided against those terrors on the other, I should be an instrument of winning one soul to the love and obedience of Christ!

To this subject the words of the text naturally lead me. David was a great and mighty prince: and it should seem from what follows in the next verse, that he was at this time in the height of worldly prosperity. But his prosperity did not, as is too often the case with us, banish death from his thoughts. No. He knew how to admit a contemplation of this sort amidst the most cheerful scenes. Nay he knew how hereby to add beauty to a composure, which for sprightliness of imagination and softness of expression, as well as for the accuracy and justness with which he keeps up the figure, exceeds almost any other of the kind in the book of Psalms.

The blessed God he introduces in the character of a shepherd, at once congratulating himself on the happiness he enjoyed under his pastoral care, and expressing his assured hope that he should still enjoy the divine bounty, guidance and protection. 'The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake *a*.' How soft, how soothing the description! The tenderness of the shepherd's heart we feel—the peaceful pleasures of the happy flock we enjoy. And thus is represented the care which a kind and merciful God vouchsafes to take of those who fear him, the constant provision he makes for their wants, both temporal and spiritual, the seasonable measures he uses for their recovery, when through temptation they go astray, and the skilful manner in which he leads and guides them in the ways of knowledge, truth and holiness. But, as a farther proof of the shepherd's tenderness and love, and of the confidence which the flock securely repose in him, he changes the scene from green pastures and still waters to a dark and gloomy vale. 'Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me, thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.'

a Psal. xxiii. 1—3.

Some are of opinion that by this striking image the psalmist means to describe, not death itself, but some affliction, the terrors of which bear a near resemblance to it. And certain it is that there are afflictions, especially those on a religious account, which when they rise to their greatest height do equal, yea perhaps exceed the anguish felt in extreme moments. And David is frequently used to compare his sorrows to those of a dying man. But I see no necessity for departing from the first and obvious sense of the words. *The shadow of death*, may, without any kind of impropriety, be understood of death itself. Nay it is thus used in several other passages of Scripture, as particularly, where Job speaking of the wicked says, 'The morning is to them even as the shadow of death: if one know them, they are in the terrors of the shadow of death *a*;' that is, they dread a discovery as men commonly dread death. And the phrase in the text might be rendered, 'the valley of the deathly shade.' Considering the psalmist therefore as speaking here of death, we have in the words—The idea he framed of it, with all the terrors both real and imaginary, which usually attend it—And the fortitude of mind he possessed in the view of it, with the grounds and reasons of that happy temper.

First, His description of death is amazingly striking and expressive. He compares it, not to a gate through which a man instantly passes, but to a dark, deep, long, dreary vale. A vale over which hang steep and craggy precipices, tremendous to be beheld, and which cast a long and horrible shade all through it. A vale in which the unhappy traveller is exposed to various and unknown dangers, where he is liable every moment to be swallowed up in pits of mire and water, or to be torn in pieces by beasts of prey. A vale in which his ear is assaulted with hoarse and dismal sounds, and his imagination overpowered with black and melancholy ideas. In a word, a vale tedious and long, and through which he walks with a slow and doubtful pace. So when the prophet Jeremiah speaks of the wilderness through which the Israelites passed, he describes it as *a land of deserts and of pits, a land of drought, and of the shadow of death*; and *a land that no man had been used to pass through, and where no man dwelt b*. And, as if the figure had been incapable of

a Job xxiv. 17. *b* Jer. ii. 6.

fully expressing his ideas, he introduces the king of terrors himself, that huge monster, as extending his shadow large and horrible all over this valley, and totally obstructing what little remaining gleams of light it might otherwise enjoy. And thus into his account of death he takes all the dismal appendages, all the sad solemnities of it. So that here is a combination of gloomy ideas, darkness and danger, solitariness and weariness, doubt and uncertainty, fear and horror, in short every thing that is terrible, frightful and alarming. Such is his description of death. And now,

Secondly, What is his language, inspired as he was with the hopes and comforts of religion, in the view of this sad and solemn scene? *I will fear no evil: for thou art with me, thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.* Happy man! Who would not wish to possess his faith, his resolution?

I will fear no evil. Numerous and great are the evils, as we shall quickly see, to which death exposes mankind—evils which it is scarcely possible for humanity, much less for a guilty conscience to apprehend without dread. "But, be these evils what they may, I will not fear them. No; I will not, though at the same time I acknowledge myself a feeble helpless sheep, and as such prone to fear. They may startle, but they shall not confound me. They may at their first appearance surprise, but they shall not overcome me. I will not yield to fear, but confidently rely on my God. Though ten thousands of these evils set themselves against me, I will not be afraid. No, I will not fear though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea." And why?

Because thou art with me—"*Thou*, a skilful compassionate and faithful Shepherd, who well knowest the dangers which await the flock in this dreary valley; who tenderly pitiest them amidst their weakness and their fears, and art ever able to aid, support and deliver them.—Thou who hast hitherto been *my* shepherd; hast guided and defended me all my days: hast supplied my wants, when every resource of nature hath failed; and restored my soul when on the brink of miseries worse than death.—Thou art *with me.* In the midst of this gloomy vale I believe thee to be present. Here I have thee immediately before my eye. I feel, I enjoy thy comforting, thine enlivening

presence. Therefore I will not, I do not fear." And good warrant had he, hath every Christian, for such confidence. God himself says, 'Fear thou not, for I am with thee; be not dismayed, for I am thy God; I will strengthen thee, yea I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness *a*.' And again, 'When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burnt; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee *b*.'

He adds—*Thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.* The rod and the staff denote the same thing, the pastoral care, of which they are both the signs and the instruments. With the one and the other (for they are terms promiscuously used in Scripture) the shepherd is said *to feed c* his flock, and *to number* them *d*. His crook he uses to guide them from field to field, to bring them back when they wander into by-paths, to remove obstructions out of their way, and to drive off beasts of prey when they would scatter, worry or devour them. And by such figures doth he describe those divine influences, by which he was well assured he should be sustained in his last moments. "Unfruitful as that valley may seem, he will there find pasture to feed me with. Dark and intricate as the way may be, with his staff he will point out the path for me, and prevent my falling into pits that would ingulph and swallow me up. And numerous as the evils, temptations and fears may be that there assault me, with his rod he will drive them all away. Thus does my Shepherd, in these moments of distress and affliction, and when pity is the only aid the kindest friend can administer, sustain, defend and comfort me."

If by the rod and staff here the psalmist designed to convey an idea of any special means of support and consolation afforded the Christian in these circumstances, it may very well be explained of the gospel, which he himself calls in another place 'the rod of God's strength *e*.' With the rich discoveries, and the exceeding great and precious promises of the Bible, the spirits of the dying saint are sometimes revived, and his hopes wrought up to divine ecstasy and triumph. So that, touched

a Isa. xli. 10. *b* Chap. xliii. 2. *c* Mic. vii. 14.—Zech. xi. 7.
d Lev. xxvii. 32. *e* Psal. cx. 2.

with the rod of the gentle Shepherd, whose cheering smiles he all the while beholds, his enraptured soul cries out with triumphant joy, amid the gloomy horrors of this dark valley, 'O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who giveth me the victory, through Jesus Christ my Lord *a*.'

Thus have I briefly explained the striking description the psalmist gives us of death, and his fortitude in the prospect of it. And now from this subject I shall take occasion,

I. To enter into a more particular consideration of death, and of those many circumstances which render the very apprehension of it awakening and terrible.

II. To lay before you the supports and comforts which religion is adapted to afford the Christian in this sad season; and then,

III. To improve the whole.

I. I am to attempt a more particular description of death.

Now in our account of death we shall include the preceding and consequent circumstances of it. For in this meditation we must not place ourselves at the end of the valley, but with the psalmist be content for a few minutes to go down into the dreary vale, yea, to walk through it. And how reluctant soever we may be to a contemplation of this sort, there are the most weighty considerations to persuade us to it. Die we must by and by, whether we will or not. And studiously to avoid the thought of it beforehand, argues an imbecility of mind, to say the least of it, which is highly censurable upon the most generally acknowledged principles of wisdom and prudence. Besides, the folly of such a temper must needs be exceeding great, since a familiarity with death is one very likely mean, with the blessing of God, to subdue the fear of it, and to prepare us for it. No apology therefore need be made for describing that which, though painful to be beheld even at a distance, will doubtless be infinitely more painful when it comes upon us, if not thus considered and realized beforehand.

To suppose that death is an innocent harmless thing, is to contradict the common sense and feelings of mankind. And to

a 1 Cor. xv. 53—57.

consider it as the mere effect of our original frame and constitution, and not as a punishment likewise inflicted on us for our sins, is to contradict the express declarations of the Bible. We all dread death: and a dread that is so universal can hardly be imagined to proceed entirely from groundless superstition. There are some indeed who affect to speak lightly of it: yet even these can scarce see the stroke given to a relation or a friend, especially if it be sudden, without shrinking back at the sight. Or if they have resolution enough to command their countenances and feelings on such an occasion; yet when it comes to their turn to die, they find, I may venture to affirm, an inward shuddering at the prospect, which must methinks convince them that that fear of it proceeds from other causes than mere superstition. Let us therefore, by taking such a particular view of death as fact and observation furnish, enter into the several causes of that dread of it, which mankind thus universally feel. Here then we will consider it in two points of view, as a *natural*, and as a *moral* evil; that is, as it appears in the apprehension of *Nature* and of *Conscience*.

First, How tremendous is death, even when we view it as a *natural* evil only, and separate from all considerations of a moral and religious kind! The usual forerunners of it, the stroke itself, and the consequence of it as to the body and this world, do each of them excite fear.

1. The usual forerunners of it; by which I mean sickness, and the other preceding accidental circumstances of dying. These are the heralds of the pale conqueror, who go before him to proclaim his approach. And their appearance is many times as tremendous, yea, perhaps more so than that of the conqueror himself. The house must be shaken before it comes down; the fortress assaulted before a breach is made: and the vessel tossed about with fierce winds, before the tempest tears it to pieces. Circumstances these, extremely alarming to those who are immediately concerned. In like manner, the burning fever, the wasting consumption, the racking stone, and various other diseases, either secretly mine the foundation, or suddenly and furiously pull down the walls of these earthly houses. And how can such assaults upon the human frame be even distantly apprehended, much less actually endured, without exciting horror? *We groan*

being burdened, is not the language of old age only, but many times of early life, and always of a broken and declining constitution. And can we hear these groans, and not be affected with them? Can we stand by a sick-bed, and see a friend languishing thereon, turning restless from side to side, counting impatiently the passing minutes, loathing every cordial offered him, and for days and weeks it may be dying, as Job expresses it, 'in the bitterness of his soul;' can we, I say, be witnesses of all this, without feeling a chill on our blood and spirits? It is a sad scene. And the solemnity of the scene increases as death advances. Every step the last enemy takes, alarms. Every fresh symptom strikes terror into spectators, and spreads silence and gloominess through the dwelling. The disease baffles the power of medicine—They who stand by observe its progress—the dying man watches their looks—He suspects his case to be desperate—The physician at length pronounces it so—He believes it. Now the wheel of life goes down apace. The vital flame burns faint and irregular. Reason intermits. Short intervals of sense divide his thoughts and passions; now—himself is the object; then—his family. His friends, his relations, his children crowd around his bed, shed their unavailing tears over him, and receive his last blessing. His pulse beats a surrender to the pale conqueror. His eyes swim—His tongue faulters—A cold sweat bedews his face—He groans—He expires. *Thou changest his countenance, and sendest him away a.* Can it be wondered that such scenes as these affect us? Or is it a virtue in any one to be a cool and unconcerned spectator of them? Thus are the preceding circumstances of death tremendous. And so is,

2. The stroke itself. Not having indeed felt it, we cannot frame adequate conceptions of it. Yet it must needs be painful and distressing, and so a just cause of fear. The friendship between soul and body is strong, like that between David and Jonathan. The connection is very intimate: it is the closest of all unions. It interests each party in the others pains and pleasures, and that in so sensible and instantaneous a manner as is truly astonishing. That therefore which dissolves the union, cannot but be a violent shock to nature; and so it appears to be, by the struggles which many endure in the article of death.

a Job xiv. 20.

The swellings of Jordan can scarce be beheld without shivering, especially by him who stands at the brink of it, and is just launching into it. Indeed we know not, as I said, what it is to die: imagination therefore, may unduly heighten the terror of dying. Yet, as this great change is a transgression of the original law of our existence, and hath evident symptoms of pain and anguish attending it, it would be unnatural not to dread it. It is the king of terrors, the first, the chiefest, the mightiest of all natural evils. And then again,

3. What follows, I mean in regard of this world, must needs make death yet farther distressing in the apprehension of humanity. It closes the present scene, that scene of action and enjoyment with which we have been sensibly conversant, and of which alone we have any clear and adequate ideas. It dissolves, for ever dissolves, our connections with this world, its inhabitants, businesses and pleasures. As to man, says Job, *his excellency* then *goes away a. His thoughts*, says the psalmist, his schemes, purposes and resolutions, as to the present life, *in that very day perish b.* He dieth, and he can *carry nothing away* with him *c.* Considerations these, which had their effect upon good Hezekiah himself, when in the view of death, the reasonings of nature for a while overpowered the dictates of faith and religion—'I shall not see,' said he, 'the Lord, even the Lord in the land of the living: I shall behold man no more with the inhabitants of the world *d.*' But how must these considerations aggravate the horrors of death in his apprehension, whose heart is rivetted to the world, and who hath no future prospect to balance the loss of present enjoyments! And then the state in which the body is left, a pale, cold, inactive, breathless corpse, and the deformed, corrupted, nauseous condition, to which it is quickly reduced, add a farther terror to death. Whence we find, that the very ensigns of mortality, though in themselves of trifling consideration, I mean the shroud, the coffin, the mattock, the grave, give a sudden chill to the spirits of unthinking persons. Now, on all these accounts, it is easily seen how death, considered as a natural evil only, of necessity excites fear. But the principal consideration is,

a Job iv. 21. *b* Psal. cxlvi. 4.
c Psal. xlix. 17. *d* Isa. xxxviii. 11.

SECONDLY, The terror it occasions to the conscience through an apprehension and sense of guilt.

I shall not take up your time with proving particularly that sin is the cause of death, and that it is inflicted on mankind, as the proper punishment of it. This might, with good reason, be suspected from the account we have given of the fact, since it is not conceivable, that a just and good God would deal thus with his creatures, if they had not somehow or other merited his displeasure. And Scripture puts the matter beyond all dispute; *Death hath passed upon all men, for that all have sinned a.* But my business rather is, to describe the horror which a consciousness of guilt infuses into death. This is strongly expressed by the apostle when he describes *sin* as *the sting of death b.* And indeed so it is. Hence the King of terrors derives his chief power to domineer, tyrannize and triumph over mankind. This is that which gives his countenance the most deformed and revengeful aspect, and puts a rod of iron into his hands wherewith to scourge his miserable captives. The natural fortitude of which some men are possessed might enable them to subdue, in a degree at least, those causes of fear which were just now mentioned. But this, where it prevails, quickly pulls down the most stubborn spirits, and resists the force of all soothing considerations whatever, except those which religion affords. There are instances indeed of those whose consciences are so hardened, that to appearance they are little affected with this kind of dread in the view of death. But it might easily be proved, that the consciences of such men are in a diseased and unnatural state; so that though their stupidity may prevent some present painful sensations, it is not to be accounted an advantage to them, as it will but be an aggravation of their future misery. This however is far from being the case with the generality of mankind. Infinite numbers there are who, when they enter this dark valley, acknowledge that the principal horrors of it owe their existence to a reflection on their past guilt. Conscience, though it hath long slept, usually awakes then: and loud, very loud and clamorous, are its reproaches. How tremendous to have my sins, innumerable, heinous, aggravated, repeated sins, brought up to my view, set in order before my

a Rom. v. 12. *b* 1 Cor. xv. 56.

eyes, and charged home upon my conscience; and all this at a time when I am languishing upon a bed of sickness, and broken with pain and sorrow! This surely must be distressing to the last degree; especially when the guilt which thus stares a man in the face, points not only to death as its proper punishment, but to consequences still more awful in the world to come.

Death must be dreadful even to the man who hath wrought himself up to a confident assurance, if that be possible, that there is no future state. For how can I think of being quickly annihilated, and having all my powers of action and enjoyment cut off, and for ever absorbed in silence, darkness and death, without being wretchedly melancholy in the immediate prospect of such a thick and impenetrable gloom? The only force there is in such a consideration to alleviate the dread of dying, is the comparative pleasure arising from a hope of escaping what is worse than ceasing to exist. But such a confident assurance of annihilation is what I imagine few possess. We will suppose then the man to be totally in the dark about what is to come. His views of another world are broken, confused and distracted. He is going he knows not whither. He is launching into a wide sea, without either compass or rudder to steer by. How must such a wandering, fluctuating, uncertain state of mind greatly heighten and exasperate his natural dread of death, which he sees to be inevitable!

But if we put the last, and perhaps the most common case of all, where the conscience is alarmed, I mean the apprehension of a future judgment, and the miseries of the damned; how exceedingly tremendous must be the appearance of the king of terrors under these circumstances!—*Death on his pale horse, and hell following with him a!*—The officer come to arrest the sinner, and bring him before the tribunal of a just and holy God, whence he is instantly to be sentenced to the abodes of darkness, misery and despair!—Indeed the scene is almost too horrible to be painted—The distant imagination of it is *the shadow of death*—What! O what then must be the reality!

And now this account of death, imperfect as it is, I have given you, in order to open the way to a prospect as cheerful and enlivening, as that hath been sad and solemn. Who

a Rev. vi. 8.

would not be glad, when he enters this dark and dreary vale, as we all shortly must, to possess the hopes and joys, and consequently the fortitude and resolution the psalmist expresses in the text?

PART II.

FROM the view we have taken of death, and of those many circumstances which render the very apprehension of it awakening and terrible, I proceed,

II. To describe the supports and comforts which religion is adapted to afford the Christian in this awful, this trying season. Now, in order to set its utility and importance at this time in a proper light, we shall consider—*The state in which death finds the real Christian*—And *the extraordinary aids and consolations which are then granted him.*

FIRST, *The state in which death finds the Christian*, is such as gives him great advantage against most of those evils, which render this last event so very formidable.

I mean not by what I have here to say, to raise the character of the good man above its proper standard, to divest him of infirmities and sins which are scarcely avoidable in the present life, or to describe him so mortified to the world, and so elevated to heaven, as to be perfectly superior to the feelings and fears common to humanity. No; I am sensible the best of men are but men. Yet, upon a sober review of the nature and tendency of religion, it will be found to have a force in it, where it prevails, to alleviate our fears of death, and in a degree at least to reconcile us to it. What is it that makes us *afraid* to die? It is, as you have seen, the pain of dying, and the miseries we apprehend will follow. And what is it that makes us, though we are not afraid of death, yet *reluctant* to it? It is an unwillingness to part with this world, and an unsuitableness of temper to another. Now, if the grace of God makes such a change in the state and temper of a man, as doth materially affect each of these causes, both of *fear* and *reluctance*; its infinite utility and advantage at this time we shall clearly see and acknowledge.

First, As to *dread* of death. Peace with God, and a subjection of heart to his will, are surely the most effectual antidotes

against each of those causes of it which were just now mentioned. For,

1. In regard of the *disorders that usually precede death*, and the *pain itself of dying*; what can fortify the breast against an undue dread of these evils like a sense of God's favour, and a meek submission of heart to his will? Natural courage, indeed, some men possess in a greater degree than others. And it is doubtless of no small use to them at such seasons. But it is a courage of very different consideration from that I am here speaking of. It is purely constitutional and mechanical; and so is little, if at all, owing to any prudent or rational considerations that suggest themselves to the mind. Wherefore, the proper and usual expressions of it are a wild kind of fierceness, or an unmeaning sort of stupidity. And then, as it depends wholly on the temperament of the blood and animal spirits, long and tedious illness is almost sure to subdue and conquer it. But the courage a man would wish to possess, when he is entering the valley of the shadow of death, is an even, serene, composed state of mind, accompanied with a patient submission to the will of God. Now this temper religious principles, and those only, can inspire.

What is the true and proper character of a real Christian? He is a firm believer in the perfections, providence and grace of God. To God he is reconciled by Jesus Christ, and as he hath a humble confidence in the divine mercy, so his heart is subjected to the divine authority, and his angry and tumultuous passions are softened and subdued. Now I ask, Is not the man of this character, the fittest of all others to contend with the infirmities of nature, and with death itself? To be afflicted, doth not seem to such a man, a strange or an unreasonable thing; much less is he prone to censure such dispensations as severe and unjust. "Can the judge of all the earth do wrong? Shall a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins?" He hath learned in his measure to bear the yoke, to deny himself, and to make account of pain and sorrow in time to come. And having been thus disciplined by the providence and grace of God, much of that impatience, murmuring, and fretfulness is prevented, which are not only very displeasing to God, but which tend to heighten and exasperate the anguish and misery

which attend bodily diseases: not to say here, how religious considerations may be supposed to soothe and refresh the heart of such a man, in those moments when a suspension of violent pain enables him to think and reflect; and how his affliction may be abated, by his being thus in a better capacity than others, to relish the mercies that are mingled with it. Religion then is adapted to divest death of its natural terrors, or at least to soften and assuage them. And how it precludes the other main cause of fear, I mean,

2. The sad *apprehension of future miseries*, will easily appear. This is the bitterest ingredient by far, in this last cup given us to drink. The condition of the awakened, despending sinner, in the immediate view of death and eternity is dreadful beyond description. He possesses the sins of his youth and his riper years, secret and open, with the horrid aggravations of them. They stare him full in the face, and tell him loudly, that he righteously deserves the wrath of God. These whips, these scorpions, lash his conscience, and make him a terrible spectacle to beholders. He would draw a veil over what is past, but he cannot. He remembers the warnings which Providence, which his friends, which ministers, which his own conscience have again and again given him, and how he slighted, opposed, and despised them. These things he calls to mind, and they pierce him to the heart; while at the same time, all hope of mercy is gone, and scenes of future misery crowd upon his sight.

Now, the experience and practice of religion prevent, in a great measure, these painful reflections, and those agonising prospects. For it is the happiness of the Christian, to have escaped many of the evils which occasion such keen and pungent sensations. So that his conscience is not in the diseased and restless state of his we have been describing. And then, as to the many sins and corruptions he has to lament, they are for Christ's sake forgiven him, and he is freed from condemnation. So that he hath no real ground for those sad and distracting reflections which torture the wicked; nor can those objects of future terror which assault their imagination, be with truth presented to his. He may, indeed, question his interest in the favour of God, and doubt of his future happiness. But still there is a difference between the discouragements of a timorous Chris-

tian, whose animal spirits too are enfeebled by bodily disorder; and the anguish which he feels, who at this awful time is conscious to himself that he has lived in sin, and is an enemy to God and religion. And though God may, for a time, hide his face from the Christian, and permit Satan to buffet him with his temptations; yet, for the most part, the storm after a while subsides, and peace is restored to his breast.

Peace of conscience then, in a reflection on what is past, and serenity of temper in the contemplation of what is to come, are, if I may so express it, the natural and proper state of his mind who is truly religious. So that if the health of the soul be not disordered, through any of the causes just hinted at, these effects of such health will appear as well at the close of life, as in the midst of it. And this is very commonly the case. *Mark the perfect man, behold the upright; for the end of that man is peace a.* He is not, it may be, transported with future hopes and prospects; yet, upon the faith of the gospel, and a serious review of his own state, he is well satisfied that it is all right between God and him: and so he is calm and easy. An eternal world he sees immediately before him; yet he enjoys the quiet possession of himself. Of the importance of death he is sensible; yet he is not afraid to die.—How desirable is it in such a state as this to meet the last enemy! Can we be one moment at a loss to determine which is to be preferred, the pleasures of a peaceful, or the terrors of a self-condemning conscience? the dread of future wrath, or a cheerful confidence in the divine mercy, through the atoning blood of Christ? The happiness is unspeakable to be able then to say, "*This is my rejoicing, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, I have had my conversation in the world b:* and though I am conscious of much guilt, and am utterly incapable of atoning it; yet *the blood of Jesus Christ hath cleansed away all my sins*, and *in* him *the beloved I am accepted c.*" Religion then is the noblest antidote against the dread of death.

But, admitting that some men who are strangers to the grace of God, do yet through hardiness of natural constitution feel little or no dread of death itself, and through downright infidelity, or at least inattention, are little affected with the appre-

a Psal. xxxvii. 37. *b* 2 Cor. i. 12. *c* 1 John i. 7.—Eph. i. 6.

hension of its consequences in the world to come; they are nevertheless on other accounts very unwilling to die. Now,

Secondly, As to this *reluctance* to death. The grace of God strikes at the main cause of it, I mean a criminal attachment to the present world, and a perfect unsuitableness of disposition to the heavenly state: and so, by correcting and subduing these tempers, it gives the Christian an advantage over death, in this view of it, above another man,

1. *In regard of the present world, it loosens his attachment to it*, and so makes the idea of parting with it less irksome and disagreeable.

The man who is destitute of real piety is a friend of the world. There is an habitual love of it prevailing in his heart. *He walks by sight. He minds earthly things.* Either the profits, honours or pleasures of the present life are his main enjoyments. They are the idols he worships, and at the very apprehension of being stripped of them, he cries out with Micah, 'They would take away my gods, and what have I more *a*?' Now to one of this character the thought of dying must be very sad indeed! He can look upon death in no other light than that of a fierce robber, who aims at spoiling him of his best and most valuable possessions.

But the reverse of this is the character of a man of religion. An estimate he has made of the world, and joined issue with Solomon in the sentence he pronounces upon it. He has looked around him upon this and the other delectable enjoyment, and with eagerness put the question, Is happiness, perfect happiness in you? So he hath said to wealth and power and honour, to the gratifications of sense, to improvements in human knowledge, to the sweets of friendship, and to the tender feelings of consanguinity and natural affection. And in the reply they each make he has readily acquiesced. Whatever comparative value therefore there may be in these enjoyments themselves, or however unduly his passions may be sometimes captivated with them; his judgment is fully convinced of their vain and unsatisfying nature, and his heart is by the grace of God rescued from the dominion they once had over him. 'By the cross of Christ he is crucified to the world, and the world

a Judges xviii. 24.

to him a.' Now surely this indifference to the things of sense, which is unquestionably the natural and genuine fruit of true religion, must needs have a happy effect to abate, if not wholly overcome, a man's reluctance to death. He that hath little to expect from the present life, must feel less pain at the thought of parting with it, than another who has an extravagant and insatiable fondness for it. And then,

2. *As to the world to come, the grace of God forms him into a temper suited to it.*

We are very sure that the happiness of heaven must be pure and spiritual, and of a nature widely different from that which the generality of mankind covet and pursue. It must consist in a steady contemplation of the infinite glories of God; in a continual intercourse with holy beings, on subjects the most sublime and exalted; in exercises of pure and sinless devotion; and in unwearied acts of cheerful and uniform obedience. Now the very idea of this is so far from being agreeable to a carnal mind, that it is highly disgusting and irksome. And were a wicked man to be assured, that death would certainly remove him into such a state, that assurance, instead of reconciling him to the change, would rather make him averse to it. He wishes for that kind of heaven alone, which Mahomet promises his disciples.

Of indispensable importance therefore it is, to the overcoming that reluctance to death, which arises from this consideration, to have the heart formed into an aptitude to the business and enjoyments of the other world. And such is the effect of the influence and operation of divine grace upon it. Where religion prevails, a preference will be given to the pleasures resulting from the favour of God, and the pure and spiritual exercises of the mind, to any other whatever. And though the best of men, by reason of the remains of imperfection and sin which still cleave to them, will endure many painful struggles within, and sometimes suffer a sad suspension of their noblest comforts; yet the hope of being freed from sin, and enjoying such a kind of heaven as I have been describing, will afford them solid satisfaction. And it is easy to see that this being their habitual temper, they are better prepared for this great change than

a Gal. vi. 14.

other men. That which the sinner would account a great infelicity, is in the apprehension of the good man the highest bliss.

Thus it appears then, that the state in which death finds the real Christian, gives him an advantage against most of those evils, which render the apprehension of it formidable. Whence the utility of religion at this most important juncture is clearly evinced. And now,

SECONDLY, Let us take a view of *those extraordinary supports and consolations, which it pleases God to afford some Christians in their last moments.* And here,

1. It is remarkable that many persons do at this time enjoy an unusual flow of animal spirits.

How this is, I will not pretend to say; whether it may be accounted for on physical principles, or is to be attributed to the immediate influence of an all-wise and good Providence. It is possible that the violent struggles of nature, when the constitution is just breaking up, may give an extraordinary force and energy to the animal spirits; like a candle, which, when it is nigh being extinguished, will suddenly recover itself, and shoot out its light with unusual brightness towards the last. This is very observable in some disorders; and being no other than a mere effort of nature, is common to bad as well as good men. But the effect, in some instances, so far exceeds the force of any natural, apparent cause, that we may with good reason impute it to the particular favour of divine Providence. And this, I doubt not, they who have stood by the dying beds of Christians have observed with peculiar pleasure. Some of them, and those too, who, when in health, were of a different complexion, have happily enjoyed a clearness of perception, a liveliness of imagination, and a strength and vigour of spirits, which have been truly astonishing. I say not that this is the case of all. But so it is in some instances. And I know no reason why it should not be ascribed to a special and extraordinary influence exerted upon the animal frame. But be this as it may, it is certain,

2. That their minds are often composed, and their hearts sustained, by a seasonable reflection on the great truths of religion.

These are at all times, if properly applied, the noblest cordials that can be administered to the afflicted breast: but they

are never so salutary as on these occasions, when it is out of the power of any worldly considerations to afford relief. How soft and pleasing that idea of the blessed God which the gospel suggests, as laying aside all the terrors of avenging justice, and assuming, for Christ's sake, the endearing characters of a friend and parent! How enlivening the consideration of that *everlasting covenant* he has made with his people, *ordered in all things and sure a!* How reviving the many exceeding great and precious promises of his word, that *he will never leave nor forsake them b;* that *when they pass through the fire he will be with them, and through the waters they shall not overflow them c;* and that *when flesh and heart fail them, he will be the strength of their heart and their portion for ever d!* How soothing, in a word, the reflection, that, *as the children were partakers of flesh and blood,* the Son of God *also took part of the same e;* that *he has borne their griefs and carried their sorrows f;* that *he has redeemed them from the curse g* of all those evils they endure; that *he has, by dying, destroyed him that had the power of death h;* that *he is* now *touched with the feeling of their infirmities i;* and that he lives to take care of them in the hour of death, and by his own kind hand to conduct them safe to mansions of eternal glory! These truths are evidently adapted to compose the mind, to reconcile it to the will of God, and to inspire it with resolution.

Sickness indeed, is not a time for close and fixed meditation. The thoughts are usually broken and confused, and the attention disturbed and interrupted. Yet a glance only at these matters hath a happy and salutary effect to hold up the sinking Christian from despair, and keep him steady amidst the storms of his approaching dissolution. God is pleased likewise to strengthen his mind for such reflections, to impress them with power on his heart, and to make them effectual to the purposes just mentioned. So that as the outward man decays, the inward is renewed day by day. What serenity have the countenances of some timorous Christians assumed, whilst their friends have been reminding them of these truths! How have

a 2 Sam. xxiii. 5. *b* Heb. xiii. 5. *c* Isa. xliii. 2.
d Psal. lxxiii. 26. *e* Heb. ii. 14. *f* Isa. liii. 4.
g Gal. iii. 13. *h* Heb. ii. 14. *i* Chap. iv. 15.

their pains been soothed by these pleasant sounds! And how have they expressed, though with faultering lips, the inward satisfaction and composure they have felt!—"The foundation of God standeth sure—He is faithful that hath promised—I have cast anchor on his truth and goodness—There I leave myself—I hope, I trust all is well." But it is the happiness of some of them,

3. To enjoy at this critical season an assurance of faith.

They are not only well satisfied of the grounds on which their future expectations are built, and have *a good hope through grace*, as the apostle expresses it *a*; but they are relieved of all their doubts, and possess a firm persuasion of their everlasting felicity. *Fear and dread fall upon their enemies*, as Moses says of the Canaanites; *they are still as a stone, till thy people pass over, thy people, O Lord, whom thou hast purchased b.* The conflicts which they before endured are now at an end. The grand question is decided. They *know whom they have believed, and* are *persuaded that he is able to keep what* they *have committed to him against that day c.* They *are sealed with the Spirit of promise d*, and are waiting for their dismission hence to glory.

O how fair the appearance religion now assumes! How attractive the charms it now wears! Who can behold the dying Christian in this temper, without envying him of the pleasure he feels? His joys it may be are not ecstatic and triumphant; yet he is more than composed, for he is cheerful; more than peaceful, for he is happy. He possesses himself. And smiling upon his friends, instead of waiting to receive consolation from them, he becomes their instructor and comforter. How calm his reasonings! How pleasing his reflections! How gentle and persuasive his admonitions! From him then let us now learn what it is to die, and what is the use of religion in death—"Life, with all its pleasant scenes, says he, is passing away; but I regret not its loss. I have long since pronounced vanity on the world: more substantial bliss I have in prospect—Afflicted I am; yet my affliction is light and momentary, less, far less than I have deserved. It is the will of my heavenly Father, and I submit

a 2 Thess. ii. 16. *b* Exod. xv. 16.
c 2 Tim. i. 12. *d* Eph. i. 13.

to it. He makes my pillow easy, and why should I murmur? —Death I see approaching; but I am not afraid to die. My sins, which I have felt and bewailed, the blood of Christ hath done away; and being reconciled by his death, how much more shall I be saved by his life! O how precious is Christ now to my soul! How reviving the hope of dwelling for ever with him! —With you, my friends, I must quickly part; but I have a better company to join.—I commit you into the hands of a good God, and hope to meet you again—O make him your trust, and he will never forsake you."—Happy man! Who would not be glad, in this temper of mind, to make his exit hence?—And yet a higher degree of happiness still is the exalted privilege of some few holy men of God; for there are those,

4. Who pass o the stage of life triumphantly.

To composure succeeds cheerfulness; to cheerfulness assurance; and to assurance an ecstasy of divine joy—an elevation of the mind to God, that is truly noble and astonishing, and yet widely different from the unmeaning raptures of imagination and enthusiasm. It is the genuine effect, not of an artificial management of the passions, but of a deep and lively impression of eternal things upon the heart. It is a kind of exultation that, instead of weakening or obstructing the powers of reason, refines and improves them. For the same heavenly ray that warms, enlightens; beams upon the understanding, while it enkindles the affections.—O with what refulgent splendour do the glories of the other world now dart upon the whole soul, and light it into one bright and inextinguishable flame! How doth the countenance of the transfigured Christian, if I may so describe him, resemble that of an angel of God, while like Stephen he sees the glory of God, and Jesus standing at his right hand: and while like Elijah his immortal spirit ascends to heaven in a chariot of celestial fire! All thoughts about the present world, all dread of death, yea his very pains, are absorbed and swallowed up in that sense he feels of the love of God, and in those transporting perceptions of approaching bliss which overwhelm his heart. He is just setting foot on the shore of Canaan—at the very suburbs of heaven—stretching out the hand to seize the crown. His imprisoned spirit, impatient of confinement, is ready to burst the shell, and to force its passage out of this tenement

of clay. He can scarce contain himself. His joy is unspeakable and full of glory. Now with the great apostle he sings, —'O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who giveth me the victory through Jesus Christ my Lord *a*.' Now with Job he exults,—'O that my words were written in a book! that they were graven with an iron pen and lead in the rock for ever! For I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day on the earth. And though after my skin, worms destroy this body; yet in my flesh shall I see God *b*.'—I now see him—It is enough. Thus led by the hand of the good Shepherd, and thus comforted with his rod and his staff, he passes joyfully the dark valley of the shadow of death; and even before he gets through it, joins the angelic throng who wait his arrival, in the new and triumphant song of Moses and the Lamb.—And now,

III. What improvement is to be made of these things? Why,

1. From the terrors of death, as you have heard them described, we may take our measures of sin. God is unquestionably most wise and good. And death is, in the apprehension both of nature and conscience, a very great evil. Mankind must therefore have offended God in a very high degree, or he would not have inflicted so ignominious and bitter a curse upon them. Go, ye who make a mock of sin, see the king of terrors wreaking his resentments on the impenitent and ungodly, and then say, Whether that which gives the last enemy so ghastly a countenance, and arms him with such sharp and poisonous darts, is not of all evils the greatest? O if men did but seriously listen to the great truths which this last solemn event teaches, they would not, they could not think so lightly of sin, much less so greedily commit it, as they commonly do!

2. How infinitely are we indebted to the blessed God, for that glorious deliverance from the terrors of death and its tremendous consequences, which the gospel so mercifully proposes! Death had made an eternal sacrifice of every individual of the human species to the just resentments of Heaven, had not the Son of God interposed, and by dying satisfied the demands of

a 1 Cor. xv. 56, 57. *b* Job xix. 23—26.

justice, and destroyed him that had the power of death, that is, the devil. O amazing love of the Father, that he should not spare his own Son, but freely give him up for our sakes! And O amazing love of Christ, that he should taste death, in all the bitterness of it, to provide for our support and comfort in these trying moments! What gratitude, as well as joy, should inspire our hearts, while we reflect thus on the infinite expence at which we are saved from the curse of this the greatest of natural evils, and in the prospect of which the stoutest heart trembles!

3. What an inestimable blessing is true religion! It is the only thing that will stand us in stead in the hour of death. Neither wealth, nor power, nor greatness, nor friends, will be of any avail then. Men may despise it when they are in health and strength, and in the midst of affluence and pleasure; but where is the wretch that dares laugh at it in the immediate views of eternity?—Ah! no. They then think otherwise. Had they millions of worlds, they would part with them all, to obtain the comforts and hopes I have been just now describing. How desirable then is an interest in Christ! He alone can save an immortal soul from the miseries of the second death, and give it an admission into the realms of light and glory above. O may this therefore be the grand object of our concern, and may every thing else be held in sovereign contempt, when compared with this, the greatest good! In one word,

4. If there are such supports provided for the dying Christian, and such bright prospects beyond the grave; then let the faith of these things have its suitable effect on our temper and conduct—to moderate our affections to the world—to reconcile us to our afflictions—to infuse sweetness into our enjoyments—and to subdue in us the fear of death. *The Lord is* your *Shepherd*, Christian, you *shall not want.* He will take care of you all the days of your pilgrimage on earth. He will sustain you with his *rod and staff* in *the valley of the shadow of death.* And he will at length give you a joyful entrance into the heavenly world, where you *shall dwell in his house for ever.*

DISCOURSE XVII.

THE FINAL CONSUMMATION OF RELIGION IN HEAVEN.

ROM. VI. 22.——*The end everlasting life.*

IT hath ever been the perverse language of the men of this world, "What is the Almighty that we should serve him? and what profit shall we have if we pray to him?" A kind of expostulation which argues as great a degree of ignorance and folly, as of impiety and profaneness. What profit?—There is great profit in serving God. Thousands in every age have borne this honourable testimony to real religion. A mighty prince, and the wisest too that ever swayed an earthly sceptre, hath told us that *the ways of wisdom are pleasantness, and all her paths are peace* a. And the great apostle of Christ, whose testimony is unquestionable, hath assured us that *godliness is profitable unto all things, having a promise of the life that now is* b. But, admitting that it were in some respects otherwise—admitting that the path in which the Christian is led, were dark, rough and intricate, and that temptations, dangers and sorrows awaited him all his way through this wilderness; yet still the profit is great, inconceivably great: for THE END IS EVERLASTING LIFE.

Such you see is the language of the text. And the argument receives no small additional force from the very striking light in which the apostle hath placed it; I mean the contrast he forms between the characters and future condition of the righteous on the one hand, and of the wicked on the other. He had been reasoning with the Christians at Rome upon their obligations to obedience. And in order to fix these impressions the deeper in their hearts, he reminds them of the miserable state they were in, while under the power of sin and unbelief; and then opposes to that state their present happy condition,

a Prov. iii. 17. b 1 Tim. iv. 8.

and their future glorious prospects. 'What fruit had ye then in those things, whereof ye are now ashamed? for the end of those things is death. But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life.'

And thus may the very same question be retorted upon the men of vice and sin, which as we have observed, they are so prone to put to the Christian—What profit have you in serving Satan, and the lusts of your own hearts? You will say perhaps in the language your master would have once put into the mouth of Job, "Think you we serve him for naught?"—No. We don't think you serve him for naught. You have your reward, such as it is! even the poor pittance of some little transient sensual pleasure, which fails not to bring after it either sooner or later shame and misery. *The wages of sin is death a.* But as to the man of religion, though he may be exposed to some present outward inconveniencies; yet, having his fruit unto holiness, he even now participates the joys of faith, and in the end shall possess eternal life.

By *eternal life* is meant the happy condition of good men in the world to come. It is expressive of their existence after death, of the perfection to which their nature shall attain, and of the uninterrupted felicity they shall enjoy to all eternity. How well the phrase is adapted to convey each of these ideas, and with what propriety therefore it is so frequently used in Scripture to describe the heavenly state, I hardly need observe. Now the text tells us that *the end* is eternal life; a mode of expression which may,

1. Point out the *term* at which the future happiness of the Christian shall commence, even the close or period of the present life. When this life ends that shall begin. To the short winter day we spend here on earth, shall *immediately* succeed one long never-ending age of bliss and glory in heaven.

Some there are who defer the happiness of the saints to the morning of the resurrection, and suppose the soul sleeps with the body till that time. A notion this which, methinks, cannot fail of casting a gloom over the minds of good men, on the one hand, who must needs wish to remain in possession

a Ver. 23.

of themselves after death; and of affording pleasure to the wicked, on the other, who would gladly get rid, though it were but for a time, of the painful reflections and fears which their guilt excites. This objection may, indeed, seem to be removed by the consideration, that the two points of the soul's falling asleep and awakening must to its own apprehension be united, there being in this case no consciousness during the intervening space. But (not to say how few there are upon whom such a refinement will be likely to have any effect) it is farther to be objected to this notion, that if the soul may sleep for a hundred or a thousand years, it may, for aught there is in the soul itself, sleep for ever: and so all the arguments in favour of a future state, arising from the natural immortality of the soul, are entirely destroyed. The definition however of the soul, as being an active, conscious principle, and of a nature perfectly remote from matter, seems to me the most just and accurate that can be given of it. And if that be admitted, I do not see how the idea of its sleeping, or ceasing to think and act, can be reconciled to it.—But it is by Scripture that our faith as Christians must be regulated; and I cannot perceive any real ground in that sacred book for this unpleasing notion. On the contrary, our Saviour evidently takes the doctrine of a separate state for granted in the parable of Dives and Lazarus *a*. He clearly asserts it in his words to the penitent thief on the cross, *To-day shalt thou be with me in paradise b*. And as the apostle's declaring, that he judged it *far better* for him *to be with Christ* than to continue here, supposes it *c*; so the same apostle elsewhere expressly speaks of *being absent from the body, and present with the Lord d*. Nor is there any intimation given us in Scripture, as I remember, that a separate state of existence is a privilege peculiar to the apostles. It follows therefore that the end of the present life, is to the Christian the term at which his future happiness will commence. Again,

2. The phrase may be designed to intimate yet farther, that the happiness which the saints enjoy in heaven, is the *perfection* of what they in a degree attain to here on earth. And so this future eternal life is to be considered, not only in opposition to

a Luke xvi. 19,—ult. *b* Luke xxiii. 43.
c Phil. i. 23. *d* 2 Cor. v. 8.

their existence here, but likewise in reference to that divine life which is here begun in their hearts. The apostle had been speaking of their having their fruit unto holiness; and so very properly adds, that *the end*, or the final completion of this life of holiness on earth, will be *eternal life* in heaven.

When men are converted and become truly religious, they are represented in Scripture as being *quickened* or made alive by the grace of God *a*. *They have eternal life*, that is, the seeds, the beginning, the dawn of eternal life *in them b*. And when they are removed hence, these principles or habits of grace which were thus generated in their hearts here, are ripened, matured and brought to their utmost perfection. Now this description of heaven furnishes us with perhaps the most clear and just conceptions of the happiness of it, that are attainable in the present life. For we need only recur to what true religion is, and having divested it of the error, weakness and imperfection which at present attend it, we at once get a bright and pleasing idea, though still but a partial one, of what the bliss and glory of that world really is. It is the knowledge of the blessed God, and of our Lord Jesus Christ in its most improved and perfect state; a knowledge which, even now, sometimes entertains, surprises and animates the Christian. It is the consummation of those divine virtues and graces which, even at present, adorn the good man, and render him in a degree happy and useful. There he will actually be, what he here sincerely aims and ardently wishes to be. Fix your eyes, Sirs, upon the man who is best skilled in divine knowledge: in him you see the early dawn of that light which irradiates the minds of the blessed above. Mark the countenance, the temper, the deportment of the Christian, who excels in meekness, humility, love and obedience; in him you see the lineaments, the features, the distant resemblance of those who are grown up to the stature of men in Christ Jesus, who are now of age, and are entered upon the possession of that inheritance of which they were the other day, the heirs and expectants only. *The end is eternal life*—the perfection of real genuine religion, the highest improvement of virtue, the final consummation of grace.—Once more,

a Eph. ii. 5. *b* 1 John iii. 15.

3. Eternal life is *the end* of holiness as it is the *reward* of it. They who have their fruit unto holiness shall assuredly receive this recompence at the hand of divine mercy. Not that there can be any merit in the obedience of a creature, restored as he is from a state of guilt and apostacy to the favour and love of God. They who never sinned have yet no demand to make upon their Creator, but, on the contrary, most humbly acknowledge, that all they enjoy they owe to his goodness. Much less hath the holiness of a Christian, defective and polluted as it is, the least pretension to merit. 'If thou, Lord, shouldst mark iniquities,' says the psalmist, 'O Lord, who shall stand *a*?' and our Saviour requires us, when we have done all those things we were commanded, to say, 'We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do *b*.' And such will be, such is the temper of every real disciple of Jesus. Whilst, therefore, the apostle, in the verse immediately following the text, speaks of death as *the wages* of sin, he represents eternal life as *the gift* of God; and as the gift of God, *through Jesus Christ our Lord*, he having not only by his ministry brought life and immortality to light, but by his obedience and death expiated our offences, and reconciled us to God. So that the divine justice is secured from all imputation of partiality, while mercy triumphs in bestowing heaven on those who had violated the laws of their Creator. And yet the blessedness of the future state is often spoken of in Scripture under the notion of a reward. The reasons of which may be—because, though it is the reward of grace, it is promised to them, and to them only, who have their fruit unto holiness—because men will be dealt with at the last judgment according to their real characters, that is, the wicked will be condemned, and the righteous will be acquitted, the merit of their salvation being at the same time referred to the mediation of Christ alone—because, farther, there will be degrees of happiness dispensed to Christians, according to their various capacities and services, as seems plain from many passages of Scripture—and, in a word, the matter is so represented, to animate us to diligence and perseverance in our course of duty and suffering.

a Psal. cxxx. 3. *b* Luke xvii. 10.

And now, having explained the text with as much brevity as I well could, we proceed to discourse more particularly of that ETERNAL LIFE which is the end of the happy experience and practice of true religion; and which *he* shall most certainly enjoy, who *being made free from sin, becomes a servant to God*, and *hath* his *fruit unto holiness*. And here I shall,

I. Lay before you the evidence we have of a future state of happiness;

II. Attempt some description of that state; and,

III. Make a suitable improvement of this very important and animating subject.

I. Let us begin with the evidence of a future state of happiness.

So generally does the doctrine of rewards and punishments after death obtain in the world, that an enquiry into the grounds of it may, at first view, seem unnecessary. But whoever considers that there are some few who deny this great doctrine, or, however, do their utmost to persuade themselves, that it hath no other foundation than in mere fancy and superstition; that the greater part of mankind take the question for granted, without entering seriously into the merits of it; and that those who hold it upon the fullest and clearest evidence of reason and conscience, and most sincerely wish there may be a future state, are yet sometimes afflicted with doubts concerning it: whoever, I say, considers these things, and reflects likewise on the infinite importance of the matter, and on the thick and impenetrable darkness which Providence hath cast over the world to come, so that we can converse with it by faith only; he must see the utility of calling up to our view, for a few moments, some of the main arguments, both natural and revealed, in favour of this one of the first principles of religion. Now,

1. The *possibility* of a future state of existence will be acknowledged on all hands. The idea does not involve in it a contradiction, absurdity, or impossibility. There is no one principle of nature, or dictate of reason, that is shocked or surprised at the thought. Nay, admitting that there is a God, it follows that he who gave the conscious spirit existence, can easily continue it in existence, even after its connection with the present state ceases; and that he who created this world,

which furnishes such stupendous proofs of almighty power, can be at no loss to make provision in another, for the rewarding his friends, and punishing his enemies. But,

2. There is a high *probability* of such a state, as appears from many considerations obvious to the perceptions and reasonings of every man.

We have each of us a power of thinking, reflecting, willing and performing various acts, wherein our business, happiness and importance as intelligent creatures consist. This active conscious principle we call the soul. It hath its seat at present in the body; though it is evidently of a nature very different from the body, and hath no symptoms or appearances attending it, which foretel its passing under such changes as are common to matter. The entire extinction of thought, will, and consciousness, or in other words the annihilation of the soul, is an unnatural idea, and gives pain to every mind except his whose guilt excites a dread of something worse than a privation of existence. Nay, there is in all mankind an eager appetite or desire of immortality. And one should hardly suppose that he who made us would infuse such a propensity into our nature, without any intention to gratify it.

It is a fact likewise, that this notion of the immortality of the soul hath generally obtained in the world *a*. The heathens had an idea of it, some of them firmly believing it, others amidst all their doubts earnestly wishing it might prove true, and the rest, few if any of them, absolutely denying it. Now the general prevalence of this doctrine is not easily to be accounted for, without allowing that it hath some foundation in truth and reason. Admitting however that the notion first sprung from mere fancy and imagination, that it was quickly adopted and improved by artful men to answer secular and political purposes, and that so it became universal; yet it should seem strange, that an infinitely wise and good God should in no age interpose his authority, to undeceive men upon a point of so interesting a nature.

To which it should be added, that if the history of man is confined to the present life, and hath no connection with a future; the ways of Providence, in general, are enveloped in im-

a —— Permanere animos arbitramur consensu nationum omnium, &c. Cic. *Tusc. Quæst.* lib. 1.

penetrable darkness and mystery, and we are deprived, in a great many particular instances, of the only means of defending the wisdom and justice of God from the imputation of weakness and partiality.—As to the general conduct of Providence: There is an amazing exertion of power in the building, adorning and supporting the curious fabric of this world. But how strange! that the blessed God should be at so prodigious an expence, if his only object were to provide for the entertainment of a succession of short-lived creatures, who, when they die, should cease to exist *a*, and whose characters and actions should have no reference to a future state. No one can examine carefully the history of the world, without being struck with surprise at the various stupendous events and revolutions which have taken place in it, and without acknowledging, methinks, that they must have come to pass by the permission and influence of divine Providence. But what shall we think of the wisdom of God, or of his other attributes, if we will not admit that these events bear a relation to one grand plan, which, when completed, shall be exhibited to the view of the whole intelligent creation, and especially to them who have been the instruments employed to carry it into execution?

And then, as to individuals. It is a fact, which they who believe and who do not believe the Bible must acknowledge, that there are some righteous, and some wicked men, some comparatively good, and some bad, some who have the fear of God before their eyes, and some who riot in wantonness and sin. And it is also as evident, that the blessings of Providenee are promiscuously dispensed among mankind; nay, that the wicked often prosper, while the virtuous are oppressed and afflicted. Now, how natural is it to conclude from hence, that there is another state of existence wherein all these matters shall be explained, and both the justice and goodness of God vindicated and honoured? and however it may be thought by some, that there is a more equal distribution of happiness among mankind in the present life than is commonly apprehended; yet even in

a Si sine causa gignimur; si in hominibus procreandis providentia nulla versatur, si casu nobismetipsis ac voluptatis nostræ gratia nascimur; si nihil post mortem sumus: quid potest esse tam super vacuum, tam inane, tam vanum, quam humana res est, quam mundus ipse? LACTANT. lib. 7.

this case it must be acknowledged, that it is the hopes and comforts of religion which have the chief influence in bringing matters to a balance. And it should seem strange indeed, that *that* which gives rise to the most rational and desirable joys of the present life, should in the end prove no other than a deception.

Thus probable is it, upon the principles of reason and present appearances, that the soul is immortal, and that there is a future state of rewards and punishments. But not to rest the matter here, there are,

3. Such farther grounds for our belief of these important truths, as amount to a *certainty*. For, if God hath given us a positive revelation from heaven to assure us of another state, and if that revelation is authenticated by such proof as cannot be rejected without manifest absurdity; the grand question we are here considering is put beyond all possible doubt. Well; such revelation God has given us, and is contained in the scriptures of the Old and New Testament.

As to the Old Testament, though it does not treat so largely of this doctrine as the New; yet whoever attentively reads over that part of divine writ, and considers the explanation which Christ and his apostles give us of some passages in it which might otherwise seem obscure, will I think acknowledge that a future state was known and believed in the earliest ages of the world, and that the light gradually increased as the times of the gospel approached. Not to mention those texts which speak of the future condition of the wicked, and the judgment that shall pass upon them; let me recite a few scriptures among many which tell us of the happiness prepared for good men, and which is the principal object of this discourse. *Enoch walked with God, and he was not; for God took him—translated him* to another world, where he should enjoy the rewards promised to those who *please God* in this *a*. The patriarchs in after ages, if we will believe the writer to the Hebrews, *desired a better country* than that they possessed here on earth, *even an heavenly*; and *looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God b*. Job *knew that his Redeemer lived*, and *that after the present life he should see God c*. Moses *had respect*

a Gen. v. 24.—Heb. xi. 5. *b* Ver. 16, 10. *c* Job xix. 25.

unto the recompence of reward a. David rejoiced in the certain hope of *beholding the face of God in righteousness, and of being satisfied, when he should awake, with his likeness:* and assures us, *that there is verily a reward for the righteous b.* Daniel tells us, *that many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt c.* And, in a word, the prophet Hosea speaks much the same language, when with triumph he foretels our redemption from death and the grave *d.*

But in the New Testament LIFE AND IMMORTALITY *are brought to light*—are elucidated and made more clear and plain than under the former dispensation *e.* Our Lord Jesus Christ, to whose mediation we owe our hope of future happiness, hath himself placed this doctrine in the fullest light, assuring us that *the pure in heart shall see God f,* that *the righteous shall go into eternal life g,* and that *as his kingdom is not of this world,* so *it is his Father's good pleasure to give* his *little flock* another, that is, an heavenly *kingdom h.* And his apostles after him insist largely upon this great fundamental truth of religion, both in their discourses and epistles; declaring, in the strongest terms, that *God who cannot lie, had promised eternal life before the world began,* that *he had confirmed his promise by an oath,* and put the matter beyond all dispute by raising his own Son from the dead *i.* Nor shall I here particularly recite the exalted descriptions they every where give us of the world to come, and their nervous and animating reasonings from thence to that temper and conduct, which is most pleasing to God, useful to society, and beneficial to ourselves.

The certainty then of this future state of happiness is no longer to be questioned, if these assurances of it can be fairly proved to come from God. And of this we have every kind of evidence that can be reasonably desired. Here I might remind you of the antiquity, sublimity and purity of the sacred records; of the facts they relate, such as the miracles, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ, all supported by the most natural and convincing testimony; of the prophecies of the Bible, and their

a Heb. xi. 26. *b* Psal. xvii. 15. *c* Dan. xii. 2. *d* Hos. xiii. 14.
e 2 Tim. i. 10. ἐφανέρωσε. *f* Matt. v. 8. *g* Chap. xxv. 46.
h Luke xii. 32. *i* Tit. i. 2.—Heb. vi. 17.—1 Pet. i. 3, 4.

exact accomplishment, many of them in former ages, and some of them in our own times; and of the amazing spread of the gospel, and the admirable effects it hath produced in the hearts and lives of men. I might call up to your view the characters of the sacred writers, who, as they affirmed they were divinely inspired, and authenticated their affirmation by the miraculous powers they exerted, so likewise gave abundant proof that they were neither enthusiasts on the one hand, nor deceivers on the other; but on the contrary men of sound understandings and honest hearts. I might farther put you in mind of the sufferings to which they exposed themselves, by their steady opposition to the prevailing passions and prejudices of the times; and of the noble sacrifice they, many of them, made of their lives to the cause of truth. I might add the full and satisfactory evidence we have that these assurances of a future state of happiness have been preserved uncorrupt through the worst of times, by the special providence of God, and are truly conveyed down to us in these last ages of the world.

And now, who can question that the soul is immortal, that there is a future state of happiness and misery, that all mankind are amenable at the tribunal of the great God, and that their *end* who have had their fruit unto holiness shall be *everlasting life?* The evidence amounts to moral certainty. It is acknowledged indeed that the world to come is invisible: but if on that account its reality is to be disputed, there is an end to all testimony, and we may be justified in believing nothing but what is the immediate object of our senses. He who hath been in heaven has himself told us that there is a heaven; and having solemnly assured us of it, he has in our nature passed into that world. Thousands have believed it, and their faith of it has made them wiser, better and happier. And bad men, though from a consciousness of their unmeetness for it, they would fain extirpate the idea of a future state from their minds, yet know not how to resist the force of this evidence, when duly laid before them. O! that it may have its proper weight on all our minds, to awaken the thoughtless sinner to serious consideration, and to add firmness to that joy and pleasure which the Christian sometimes feels in the prospect of all this happiness and glory, of which I am quickly to attempt some faint description!

PART II.

FROM the general view we have taken of the grounds of our faith as to a future state of happiness, I proceed now, as was proposed,

II. To attempt some description of that state.

It is indeed impossible, in the present life, to acquire adequate conceptions of the felicity and glory of heaven. Our faculties are too feeble for the investigation of a subject so sublime and exalted. Yet, if we would apply ourselves closely to it (and there is surely no subject so improving, or so entertaining to a serious mind), we might, methinks, come at some juster and more animating ideas of the invisible world, than those with which we are too apt to content ourselves. The proper use of our reasoning powers, a due consideration of the present state of things and its connection with the future, a careful reflection upon what we have known and enjoyed of religion, and especially a diligent attention to the light which Scripture hath thrown upon this matter, will greatly assist us in our enquiries. It is true, the most holy place is utterly concealed from the view of the generality of mankind, and from many of those too who worship in the court of the temple. But the veil *may* be drawn aside, Christ our great High Priest, who is passed into the heavens, *hath* drawn it aside for us; and we are permitted to look in without the imputation of profaneness or presumption. He hath opened a door in heaven, and bid us come up thither, that we may take a view, though but transient and imperfect, of the happiness and glory we are by and by to enjoy. Let us then obey the divine command, take our leave for a while of this vain and busy world, and by faith join the society of the blessed.

The mind of man is so framed, that we acquire most of our knowledge in the present state by the aid of our senses. In condescension therefore to our weakness, and to allure us to still farther enquiries, God has thought fit in his word to represent invisible things to our imagination, by sensible objects with which we are continually conversant. But, at the same time, he has taken care to caution us against acquiescing in those trifling and gross conceptions of heaven, with which Mahomet hath fondly amused his votaries, without ever guarding them against this

danger. For the Scriptures assure us, that it is a spiritual state, and that the employments and fruitions of it are in truth infinitely more refined and noble, than any of the concerns of this world, or the gratifications of sense.

Let us begin then with those descriptions of heaven which are borrowed from sensible objects, and by these steps ascend to a more clear, spiritual and enlivening view of the blessedness of that state. And if we search the Bible, we shall there find a collection of the richest and most brilliant images that nature or art can supply; all of them held up to our view in such a manner, as to impress our minds with a general idea of happiness, wealth and splendour in their highest perfection. Sometimes we read of *treasures which moth cannot corrupt, nor thieves break through and steal a;* of *a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory b:* and of *an inheritance, incorruptible, undefiled, and which fadeth not away c.* Sometimes we are told of *a rest that remaineth for the people of God d,* alluding to the land of Canaan, which was given the Israelites for a quiet possession after their deliverance from Egyptian slavery, and their tedious wanderings in a barren and solitary wilderness. Sometimes we have heaven described as a *paradise e,* furnished with all kinds of *fruits,* enriched with the most delightful prospects, and watered with *rivers* of pleasure *f;* a paradise in which 'the inhabitants are none of them sick *g*,' but 'the lamb who is in the midst of the throne feeds them, and leads them unto living fountains of waters,' and the blessed *God,* with his own kind and soft hand, gently 'wipes away all tears from their eyes *h*.' Sometimes it is represented as a *house,* a house 'not made with hands, eternal in the heavens *i*,' a house in which God resides, and wherein Christ hath *prepared mansions,* or apartments, for every one of the family *k*. It is farther compared to a large and magnificent *city,* of which God is the builder, whose *streets* are *gold,* its *gates pearl,* and *the foundation of it garnished with precious stones;* a city which hath *the Lord God Almighty* for its sun *to enlighten* it, and its *temple* to adorn it; a city into which *nothing that de-*

a Matt. vi. 20. *b* 2 Cor. iv. 17. *c* 1 Pet. i. 4.
d Heb. iv. 9. *e* Luke xxiii. 43. *f* Rev. xxii. 1, 2.
g Isa. xxxiii. 24. *h* Rev. vii. 17. *i* 2 Cor. v. 1.
k John xiv. 2.

fileth can ever enter, whither *the kings of the earth, and all the nations of the earth, bring their glory and honour*, and where there is *no night*, but one bright eternal day *a*. And to give us a still more exalted idea of that blissful place, its vast extent, its splendour and magnificence, its order and regularity, its strength and safety, together with the number, wealth, peace, happiness, and glory of its inhabitants; it is described as a *kingdom b*—a kingdom which in all these respects infinitely exceeds that of the Assyrians, Greeks or Romans. Nay, each one of the saints is to possess a kingdom, for they are all of them *kings and priests unto God*, and as such to wear *crowns of righteousness* and glory, and to be arrayed in *robes* of innocence and purity *c*. But it were endless to enumerate the various figures, which Scripture hath interwoven with the accounts it gives us of the future happy state of good men. If this world, I mean the external frame of it, is amazingly beautiful and glorious; if the sun, moon and stars furnish illustrious proofs of the wisdom and greatness of God; and if even the meanest part of the creation is capable of affording entertainment and surprise to an inquisitive and contemplative mind; how great must be the beauty, magnificence and splendour of the heavenly world? that world where the great God gives the fullest display of his infinite perfections. O the immensity of that place! It hath no bounds.—The brightness of it! God is the sun.—The purity of it! Nothing that defileth shall ever enter into it.—*Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him d.*

Not, however, content with this general view of the heavenly blessedness, let us now more particularly consider—After what manner good men will exist in that state—The perfection to which their nature will attain—Their employment—The blessedness which will thence result to them—And the duration of their happiness.

First, After what manner will the saints exist in that world?

The two constituent parts of man are, soul and body. These, in the present state, are closely united, and mutually act upon each other. But at death this union is dissolved, and 'the

a Rev. xxi. 9.—ult. *b* Matt. v. 10, &c.
c Rev. i. 6.—2 Tim. iv. 8.—Rev. vii. 14. *d* 1 Cor. ii. 9.

dust returns to the earth as it was,' while 'the spirit returns unto God who gave it *a*.'—Now, as to the soul, whether it exists and acts purely of itself, I mean, unconnected with any material substance; or whether it hath some vehicle provided for its reception, which is what some think the apostle intends by our *having a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens b*, is difficult to determine. Though indeed the difficulty attending either of these questions, appears to me to be much less than that of supposing the soul sleeps, a notion which I cannot but conclude, as we have already seen, is both unphilosophical and unscriptural. Without, however, entering into a curious disquisition of these matters, all I shall here content myself with observing as to a separate state, is, that the soul exists after such a manner, as to be capable of exercising those powers which are essential to it, such as thought, consciousness and reflection. And as to the body, we are assured that *that* will be raised at the last day, and become again the mansion or place of residence of the immortal spirit. Let us therefore immediately go on to consider,

SECONDLY, The perfection to which their respective natures will attain.

Here imagination, under the guidance of Scripture, may be allowed its utmost scope; though, after all, the most fruitful imagination must needs fail in the description. Indeed we can collect but few positive ideas of the future state of either soul or body; yet the divesting both the one and the other of all present imperfections, will possess us at once with exalted conceptions of their felicity and glory. To begin then,

1. With the nobler part. What an amazing change must that be which passes on the *soul* of a good man, at the instant it is dislodged from the body! Its natural faculties are strengthened and enlarged, and its moral powers refined and purified to the highest degree imaginable. Our intellects are evidently at present in a very imperfect and defective state. Such is the slowness and obscurity of our conceptions, such the weakness and fallibility of our judgment, and such the inattention and treachery of our memory, that we find much labour necessary in order to acquire a small degree of knowledge, we are often be-

a Eccl. xii. 7. *b* 2 Cor. v. 1.

wildered in our pursuit of the plainest truths, and before we are aware, are frequently hurried into strange mistakes and errors. Nay, he who hath made the most considerable progress in knowledge, whether natural or divine, cannot fail of lamenting his ignorance, and acknowledging with concern, the dark, feeble and contracted state of the human mind. Thus it is with us in the present life. But at death, all these grievances will be instantly redressed. Our intellectual powers will then receive such an accession of strength and vigour, as will add quickness, facility and pleasure to all their operations. There will be no dullness of apprehension, or difficulty of judging; and of consequence no painful investigation of truth, no perplexed reasonings, no false and erroneous conclusions. The perception will be clear and easy, the judgment sound and steady, and the memory retentive and strong. All this the apostle plainly intimates in those memorable words of his *a*, "*Now I know in part*, my knowledge, however superior to that of some other men, is imperfect, and a great deal of it acquired with much difficulty and labour; *but then shall I know even as also I am known*; my mental sight shall be so strengthened and enlarged, and divine objects placed in such a point of light, as that my knowledge of them shall bear some resemblance to that of God, whose eye does not only glance at the surface of things, but enters into their nature, and instantly comprehends all their hidden qualities."

And then, as to the moral powers of the soul, these will be refined from all the pollutions of sin and sense, and restored to a state of perfect rectitude and purity. The renovation of the heart is indeed the great object of religion in the present life; but that object is not, it cannot be, fully attained while we are in the body. The best of men complain of evil propensities, stubborn prejudices and irregular passions; and great is their distress on these accounts. Ah! the bitter sighs that arise from their sorrowful breasts, while they silently deplore these sad effects of human depravity—these remains of corruption and sin, which disgrace the soul, disturb its peace, and obstruct its progress in the divine life. But, when death has done his office, these complaints shall all instantly sub-

a 1 Cor. xiii. 12.

side. The very moment the imprisoned spirit is set at liberty, it is *made perfect a.* It springs, as it were, into life; for here it could hardly be said to live. It is healed of every disease, and becomes perfectly healthful and happy. It breathes the pure air of the celestial regions, free from all the oppressions of this gross atmosphere. It recovers its original beauty, freedom and glory. Every corruption is totally eradicated from the heart; and every virtuous, holy and divine principle implanted there, is at once ripened to a state of maturity. In short, as it is *created after the image of God, in knowledge, righteousness, and true holiness b,* so it henceforth exerts all its powers in the pursuit of these great objects, with infinite ease and pleasure, and without a possibility of their enduring any disturbance or opposition whatever. Thus it *beholds the face of God in righteousness,* and *awakes* out of this world into the other *with the divine likeness c.* And now what a blessed change is this! And in how different a state does the Christian find himself from that he was in a moment before, when he animated a frail and mortal body!—And so I am led to speak,

2. Of the perfection to which the *body* shall attain. That, as I said, is at death consigned to the grave, to a state of inactivity and putrefaction. But at the last day it shall be raised. The voice of the descending Saviour shall shake the sepulchres of the dead, and rouse their sleepy inhabitants into life. The scattered *bones,* to use the visionary language of Ezekiel, 'shall come together; the sinews and flesh shall come upon them, and the skin shall cover them above; the breath of the Lord shall breathe upon them, and they shall live, and stand up upon their feet, an exceeding great army *d.*' Amazing sight! Nor will the bodies of the saints rise into the same state they were formerly in. Such a resurrection would be scarcely desirable. No; they will become spiritual, glorious and immortal *e.* They will be no more liable to any of the infirmities which attend them in this life, to decay of spirits, beauty or strength; and so will require none of those supports and refreshments which nature now supplies. On the contrary, they will be ever healthy, active and strong, and ever retain their original sprightliness

a Heb. xii. 23. *b* Eph. iv. 24.—Col. iii. 10. *c* Psal. xvii. 15.
d Ezek. xxxvii. 4—10. *e* 1 Cor. xv. 42—44.

and vigour, beauty and comeliness. The senses will be refined, strengthened and enlarged. The eye, for instance, how quick, penetrating and strong! No object, however bright, will dazzle it, or give it the least uneasy sensation. The shining countenance of Moses will no longer require a veil, no, nor the more glorious countenance of Christ himself. The most distant object will be within its reach, and be as clearly beheld as if immediately present. Indeed the whole frame will be exquisitely beautiful, its proportion exact, its parts firm, its appearance lovely; suited in every respect to the guest it shall entertain, to the company with which it shall associate, to the world where it shall reside, and to the pure and spiritual services in which it shall ever be employed. The description which the apostle gives us of it is most grand and noble, when he tells us that Christ himself *shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things to himself* a. If the Son of God deigns to appear among the saints above in a human body, we may be assured it is a glorious body indeed. How glorious then must their bodies be which are fashioned after this divine model, and upon which such extraordinary power is exerted, and that by the immediate influence and operation of the Saviour himself! To these bodies then will the immortal spirit be reunited, and the union never more be dissolved.—And thus I am led from this general view of the perfection of their natures, to enquire,

THIRDLY, What is the employment of the blessed?

An indolent life is an unhappy life: it is so to a man of spirit, who understands his own proper interests and ends of existence. We cannot therefore imagine, that they who possess the dispositions and powers I have been describing, spend an eternal duration in sloth and dissipation. No; they are ever employed about matters of the highest and noblest concernment, and in a manner suited to their pure and perfect natures. Man is an intelligent and social creature: the chief business therefore of the heavenly world must consist in contemplation and conversation, that is, in the exercise of the mind upon subjects infinitely entertaining and improving, and in a mutual exchange of ideas on

a Phil. iii. 21.

such subjects. And from hence must result the most refined blessedness, which we shall attempt quickly to describe. In the mean time, let us take a general view of the company with which the blessed spirits above associate—the subject-matter of their contemplation and discourse—and the manner in which these exercises are conducted.

1. As to the company with which they associate.

In this world but little agreeable society is to be met with, but few to whom we can freely unbosom ourselves, yea none in whose acquaintance we can be perfectly happy. So that we are ready sometimes to grow weary of the world, and to say with Job, *I lothe it, I would not live alway a.* But in heaven the scene will be quite reversed. We shall commence a never-ending friendship, and an entire union of heart, with persons of the most amiable and worthy characters, and who possess every possible excellence and perfection suited to the rank they hold. We shall join *the general assembly and church of the first-born, which are written in heaven—the spirits of just men made perfect—an innumerable company of angels—Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant—and God* himself *the judge of all b.*

Do the tender feelings of nature, heightened and improved by the still nobler affections of virtue and religion, excite in our breasts an ardent desire to be admitted again to the embraces of our dear departed friends and relatives, with whom we have had sweet communion here on earth, and who are now with God? That desire will be gratified, with the additional satisfaction of finding both them and ourselves in a state of perfect happiness and glory. When we trace the characters of great and good men, as drawn in the sacred pages, men famous for their simplicity, meekness and love, for their patience, fortitude and piety, do our passions kindle into a flame, and are we almost ready to burst the bands of mortal flesh, that we may mingle with these blessed spirits above? Such also will be our exalted privilege at death. With Enoch, who walked with God here on earth, we shall intimately converse in heaven. In the bosom of Abraham, the father of the faithful, we shall gently repose our weary souls. The transfigured countenance of Moses, the great law-giver of the church, we shall behold with a steady

a Job vii. 16. b Heb. xii. 22—24.

eye. And with rapturous pleasure shall we hang on the devout songs of David, the sweet singer of Israel. Patriarchs, prophets and apostles, the illustrious army of confessors, 'who came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb *a*.' Christians of every rank and condition among men, will be our associates and companions. Their number cannot be told. Their happiness cannot be conceived. Their honours cannot be described. They are all of one mind, and one heart; so that their friendly commerce can suffer no interruption, through difference of opinion, unhappiness of temper, or any hasty prejudices whatever. They are knit to one another with indissoluble bands of esteem and love; and all the rich treasures of knowledge and pleasure which each one possesses, are cheerfully laid out to promote the growing entertainment and happiness of the whole. What a blessed company this!

Angels also make up a part of the society. Those spirits of superior rank, so variously described in Scripture, to denote their different degrees of knowledge, authority and glory—Those constant worshippers of the supreme Majesty, ministers of his pleasure, and guardians of his people *b*—Those *morning stars* that *sang together*, those *sons of God* who *shouted for joy* at the creation of the world *c*!—Those *flames of fire* whom David celebrates in the Psalms *d*—Those armies of the living God, a host of which was detached to welcome the Saviour into the world, to minister to him during his pilgrimage on earth, and to attend him afterwards to glory. How prodigious is their number! *ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands e*, yea, a number that cannot be reckoned *f*. How vast their knowledge, dominion and power! 'They excel in wisdom and strength *g*.' How extensive their benevolence and love! *They desire to look into* the mystery of redemption *h*; and while they dwell on the rapturous subject, they strike their harps with infinite exultation and joy to the 'new song of Moses and the Lamb *i*.'

a Rev. vii. 14. *b* Psal. xxxiv. 7. *c* Job xxviii. 7.
d Psal. civ. 4. *e* Rev. v. 11. *f* Heb. xii. 22.
g Psal. ciii. 20. *h* 1 Pet. i. 12. *i* Rev. v. 12.

In the midst of this illustrious multitude is seen the divine Jesus, who infinitely outshines them all in splendour and glory. O who can describe the superior mixture of sweetness and majesty, which distinguishes his countenance from theirs who stand around him? In him centre all beauty, excellence, and perfection. 'He is the chiefest among ten thousand, he is altogether lovely *a*.' There, I say, is seen that Jesus, who the other day was a poor, despised, afflicted man, but is now a happy, glorious, exalted Prince; who the other day expired in agonies upon a cross, but is now seated upon a throne, 'hath a name written on his vesture and on his thigh, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS *b*,' and reigns uncontrouled Sovereign over the universe. There he unveils his matchless glories to the view of millions of admiring spectators, converses intimately and familiarly with each one of them, and pours the richest blessings into their hearts. 'Father, I will,' said he in his last prayer here on earth, 'that they whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory *c*.' And his glory they do behold, for they *see* him *face to face d*, without any of those mediums which this our distant state requires, and without any of those interruptions and allays, which arise from sin and sense.

But more than this, God is with them. *In thy presence*, says David, *is fulness of joy, at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore e*. *The pure in heart*, says Christ, *shall see God f*. And when the apostle John would give us the brightest description of that state which language can furnish, he tells us, that *God Almighty is the temple*, and *the glory of God the light thereof g*. It is even in this life, the exalted privilege of good men to converse with God; and when, upon some extraordinary occasions, the distant rays of his infinite perfections beam upon their understandings, with the patriarch they cry out, *How dreadful is this place! it is the house of God, the gate of heaven h*. But in that other world he is seen, he is conversed with, he is enjoyed after a more perfect manner. He is present, intimately and immediately present, with each one of those happy

a Sol. Song, v. 10—16. *b* Rev. xix. 16. *c* John xvii. 24.
d I Cor. xiii. 12. *e* Psal. xvi. ult. *f* Matt. v. 8.
g Rev. xxi. 22, 23. *h* Gen. xxviii. 17.

spirits. And, O! how inconceivably bright and glorious are the emanations of light, love, and joy, which they every moment derive from that great Sun of righteousness, that pure and inexhaustible fountain of all good!—Such then is the company with which they associate. And now,

2. As to the subjects of their contemplation and discourse; we may be sure they are most interesting and important, infinitely diversified, and exquisitely ravishing and delightful.

To know the only true God, our Saviour assures us, *is life eternal a.* Indeed the divine essence can never be comprehended by a finite mind. Yet such a light will perhaps be reflected upon that mysterious communion of deity, which subsists between the Father, the Word, and the Spirit, as will enable us to apprehend, more clearly than we do now, this great truth, which bears so immediate a relation to the scheme of our redemption. In that day *we shall know that* Christ, *the true God and eternal life b*, is *in* the *Father c*; and that *the Holy Spirit the Comforter proceedeth from him d.*

The perfections of God, as displayed in his works, will then appear in all their native beauty, harmony, and glory, not, as they do at present, beclouded by the thick mists which ignorance and folly have cast before our eyes. Alas! the most sagacious philosopher is now overwhelmed with perplexity, while he wanders through this amazing system of being, surveys the innumerable orders of creatures, which inhabit and adorn our earth, considers their several capacities, relations and uses, and attempts to investigate their various hidden qualities, powers, and operations. And though, amidst this crowd of objects, he sees enough of God to fill his breast with astonishing ideas of greatness and glory; yet he can do little more than humbly trace the distant shadows of divine excellencies, and imperfectly spell out the name of the great Parent of the universe. But then, it may be, all the knotty questions, all the hard problems in natural science, which now exercise the wit and ingenuity of men, will be solved, the connection between causes and effects be clearly understood, and the beauty, harmony, and use of every part of the creation be evidently perceived. What a prodigious

a John xvii. 3. *b* 1 John v. 20.
c John xiv. 20. *d* Chap. xv. 26.

variety here for meditation and discourse! and what amazing discoveries of wisdom, power and glory, must break in upon the astonished mind! All the natural knowledge of which Solomon could boast, is but like the fond conceits of children, when compared with that light which will irradiate the minds of the blessed.

There is a Providence which governs the world, and hath an invisible and powerful influence in the affairs of every individual. And in the scheme of Providence, however complicated its several parts, there is a perfect unity of design: so that the infinitely numerous and diversified events which take place in our world, are all, someway or other, subservient to one grand end, and, in the compassing that end, there must be an amazing display of wisdom, power and goodness. This is a subject, therefore, of vast extent, and furnishes an inexhaustible variety of matter for contemplation and discourse. But alas! at present, so weak is our mental sight, that we can scarce read a line in this prodigious volume of providence without hesitating; and we have no sooner taken a step in this intricate path, than we are at a loss which way to turn. While therefore with the apostle, we lift up our astonished eyes to heaven, and say, *How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out a!* it becomes us patiently and implicitly to submit to *his* will, who we are sure does all things well. But in that better world, that land of knowledge and vision, the mysteries of providence will perhaps be unfolded, and the history of mankind, from the beginning of time to the final consummation of all things, be fully explained and understood. *What I do*, says the great Governor of the world to us, as he once said to Peter, *ye know not now, but ye shall know hereafter b.* The counsels of Heaven respecting empires, kingdoms, and particular societies of men, the means destined for carrying them into execution, and the harmonious and successful operation of these means, to the great and noble ends proposed, will be all laid open to our view. And O! what a scene of wonders will our eyes here behold! Nor will a recollection of these great events swallow up the remembrance of what hath happened to ourselves. Each one will have an exact and ample view of his own history, and will see, with pleasure

a Rom. xi. 33. b John xiii. 7.

and astonishment inexpressible, how artfully every circumstance of his life, however strange and unpromising, was so disposed, as at once to promote his own good, and to advance the general plan respecting the whole. The patriarch Joseph, that favourite of Providence, will tell how every event in his history, bore a relation both to his own personal interests, and to the future fortunes of his family, and the Jewish and Christian churches. O! what amazing discoveries will this fountain of knowledge and pleasure pour upon the inquisitive mind! But are we to stop here? No——

There is a still more exalted subject than even the administration of Providence, to employ the attention of the blessed, that is, the great work of *Redemption*. A subject this, of all others the most sublime and noble, and fruitful of infinite entertainment and delight. Here the divine glories are collected, as it were, in one point, and so held up to the view of the mind, as to possess it of the most perfect idea of God that can possibly be framed. The magnificence of Ahasuerus the Persian monarch, on ordinary occasions, was great; but when in the fulness of his joy he resolves to assemble all his princes and servants in Shushan his palace, there to make one grand exhibition of the riches of his glorious kingdom, and the honour of his excellent majesty, how must his magnificence have exceeded *a*! So, if the parallel be lawful, the Supreme Majesty seems to have devised and adjusted the great plan of our redemption in such a manner, as that, besides the benefit resulting from it to individuals (a matter, comparatively speaking, of trifling consideration), it should become an occasion of displaying his brightest glories, to the view of the myriads of happy beings assembled in his palace above. Here is a concurrence of truths too sublime and august, too strange and marvellous, too various and complicated, to be capable of description by human language. Wherever we turn our eyes, whether on the facts the gospel relates concerning the person of Christ, his offices, his miracles, his sufferings, his death, and the triumphs that succeeded it: or, on the scheme of redemption itself, the infinite extent, grandeur and harmony of the plan, the amazing glories it reflects on all the divine attributes, the relation it bears to the general

a Esth. i. 3—5.

scheme of providence, and the influence it hath on the happiness of millions of beings through an eternal duration of existence; wherever, I say, we turn our eyes, we are lost in contemplation and wonder. What inexhaustible sources are there here for the entertainment of the blessed!—God manifest in the flesh!—The Creator of the world expiring on a cross!—Guilt, complicated guilt, expiated!—Innocence retrieved!—Justice satisfied, yet mercy triumphant!—Death swallowed up in victory!—The powers of darkness routed and overthrown!—The miserable vassals of Satan made heirs of God!—Humanity united to Deity!—Angels confirmed in their bliss!—And the happiness of every individual of that vast and boundless empire, infinitely augmented by this astonishing display of wisdom, power and love!

And now, amidst all these works of God, can there be subjects wanting to excite the curiosity, to fix the attention, to entertain the imagination, or to improve and gladden the hearts of the perfect spirits above?—Nor is there, I should farther add,

3. Any kind of difficulty or embarrassment attending these exercises of contemplation and discourse, as they are conducted in that world. This may be easily concluded, from what we have already observed concerning the perfect state to which the powers of human nature shall attain.

Alas! in the present life, be the subjects we contemplate ever so sublime and exalted, there are a thousand circumstances, both within us and all around us, to impede and perplex the operations of the mind, and to restrain and cool the divine passions of the heart. No sooner have we at any time retired from the world, composed ourselves to meditation, and begun to taste the sweetness of the pleasing theme we had resolved to pursue, but instantly our promised bliss is assaulted, spoiled and laid waste, by a rude band of wild and impertinent thoughts, if not vile and base affections. Or if the devotion of the heart is strong enough to secure to us the possession of ourselves for one hour, nature quickly sinks under its own weight, and through the weakness of our faculties, we grow weary of our pleasures. *The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak a.*

a Matt. xxvi. 41.

But in heaven, the sweets of contemplation will suffer no interruption or allay from these or any other circumstances whatever. Encompassed as the immortal spirit is with scenes infinitely bright and diversified, it still stands collected within itself. Enraptured as it is with the warmest and most ecstatic passions, its perceptions and reasonings still remain clear, serene and steady. And fast as its attention is held, to truths the most abstruse and intricate, it still preserves its original sprightliness, vigour and activity. Between the object and the intellect there is a suitable proportion; and prodigious as the weight of knowledge and pleasure is, the immortal mind sustains it without the least pain or difficulty. The ease therefore, with which they pursue their contemplations, will add infinitely to the pleasure they afford.

Nor will the intercourses of the blessed be subject to any of those inconveniencies, which we now sensibly feel and lament. That there is among them a mutual exchange of ideas and sentiments, such as answers to what we mean by conversation or discourse, is not to be questioned. For otherwise, to what purpose are we told in Scripture of their forming one *general assembly a*, of their *sitting down with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven b*, of their harmoniously *singing the song of Moses and the Lamb c*, and of their uniting in the most exalted acts of homage and worship? But how this commerce is carried on, whether by intuition, or by any kind of medium peculiarly adapted to that spiritual state, is to us utterly unknown. Of this however, we may be assured, that they communicate their ideas to each other, with a clearness, facility and swiftness, to which language is an utter stranger; and that they enter into the spirit of each other's sentiments, with a warmth and ardour which it is impossible for the utmost efforts of human eloquence to inspire. So that while their discourse for the matter of it affords infinite entertainment to their pure and perfect minds, it hath never the unhappy effect, through any disagreeable mediums of communication, to fatigue and exhaust the spirits.

Such then is the employment of the blessed. They associate with the noblest company—They discourse on the most

a Heb. xii. 23. b Matt. viii. 11. c Rev. xv. 3. v. 11, 12.

exalted subjects—And they communicate their ideas and feelings to each other, with infinite ease, freedom and pleasure.

PART III.

In order to frame some idea of the happiness of heaven, we have proposed to consider—After what manner good men exist in that state—The perfection to which their nature attains—Their employment—The blessedness which thence results to them—And the duration of their felicity. We have discoursed of the three first of these, and we now proceed,

Fourthly, To speak of the refined and substantial bliss which results from those exercises of the saints, as they have been faintly described.

What hath been observed concerning the employment of the blessed, may be all resolved into the idea of communion with God. For whatever be the subjects on which they contemplate and converse, and however their hearts are affected towards each other, God is all in all. Now as God is the Chief Good, a clear and lively perception of his infinite excellencies must beget—*Love*—*Union*—*Likeness*—and *Satisfaction*; all which makes up the sum total of that bliss the saints enjoy in heaven.

1. Their contemplation of God excites in their breasts a pure and ardent *Love* towards him.

No sooner do the ideas of beauty, harmony and excellence strike our imagination, but we instantly feel correspondent affections of esteem, admiration, desire, and consequently pleasure; for of all the passions of the human soul, love is the most cheerful and enlivening, insomuch, that it sometimes produces a kind of rapture or transport in the breast. But in the present life, this passion, though wound up to the highest pitch, is not capable of making us completely happy. For, besides the consideration that our judgment and senses often deceive us, it is certain that the object beloved, be it ever so amiable, hath in it a mixture of deformity and imperfection. So that our passion for worldly good, whatever tumultuous pleasure it may excite in us for a few moments, is sure, in the end, to disappoint, if not torment us.

But the reverse of this is the case with that pure love, which results from the contemplation and vision of God in heaven. For God is supremely and transcendently glorious. There is in

him a concurrence of all possible excellencies, in their highest perfection. Whatever we perceive in the creature, that is beautiful, harmonious and lovely, and so is captivating to the understanding or senses, it resides in him as its fountain, originally, immutably and eternally. Nature, reason and religion, when viewed in their primitive state, and arrayed in all the charms imaginable by the human mind, exhibit but a faint resemblance, a pale and shadowy likeness of the infinitely blessed God. Now this great object is beheld by the saints in heaven, not at a distance, or through mediums capable of imposing upon the understanding and fancy, but as the Scriptures express it, *face to face a*, immediately, with a clear and steady eye, and without the least interruption, pain or uneasiness. There the prayer of Moses, in which thousands with devout affection have joined him, 'Lord, I beseech thee, shew me thy glory *b*,' is answered to the infinite satisfaction of all. And, thus beholding God, O how must the enraptured soul be enflamed with divine love, and feel the pleasures of that love in their highest perfection? Thus viewing the King in all his glory, how must the heart, enamoured of his infinite excellencies, cry out in the ecstatic language of the prophet, 'How great is his goodness! How great is his beauty *c*!' Thus gazing on the Sun of righteousness, shining in the full splendour of his infinite attributes, what light, and heat, and joy, must beam upon their understandings and affections! What venerable ideas of his peerless majesty! What admiring sentiments of his consummate wisdom! What cordial approbation of his perfect justice and holiness! What grateful resentments of his boundless love! And what a complacential, enlivening, transporting sense of his favour, must pervade through all the powers of the soul, dilate every nerve of the heart, and raise the spirits to a pitch of joy and gladness inconceivable by the Christian in his happiest moments here on earth:—Now, where this love of God prevails, there is also,

2. *Union* with God.

This carries our ideas of the felicity of the heavenly world still higher than has been represented. For it is one thing to perceive the beauties of an object, to feel an affection for it, and to be happy in the exercise of such affection, and another to be

a 1 Cor. xiii. 12. *b* Exod. xxxiii. 18. *c* Zech. ix. 17.

united to the object, and become one with it. I acknowledge, indeed, that we cannot at present form adequate conceptions of this union of the saints with God; yet it is a matter of which Scripture speaks, and is capable of some kind of illustration from experience. The refusion of the soul at death into the *anima mundi*, or the Deity, was a notion that obtained much among the stoical philosophers of old. And there have been those since, who, though by no means of that absurd opinion, yet have spoken of a certain illapse by which the divine essence falls in with, and, as it were, penetrates, the essence of the blessed. This they have attempted to explain, by telling us, "That as a piece of iron, red hot by reason of the transfusion of the fire into it, appears all over like fire; so the souls of the blessed, by this illapse of the divine essence into them, are all over divine." Whether any thing at all similar to this is possible, I pretend not to determine. Yet there is surely a peculiarity and importance, inexplicable by us at present, in those amazing words of our Saviour,—*As thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us a!*

But what I here mean is a kind of union with God, resembling that of friendship among men, only in an infinitely greater perfection. Where friendship is carried to its utmost height, there is such a close intimacy, such a communion of sentiments, such an entire mutual confidence, and such innumerable reciprocal endearments, as produce a oneness of interest, temper, and, I had almost said, nature, that is scarcely to be conceived, but by those who feel it. And the happiness which results hence, next to that which flows from communion with God, is the most refined and noble the present life affords. In how lively a manner does David express this union of soul with his friend Jonathan, and the rapturous pleasures of it, in those passionate words he uttered at his death, *My brother Jonathan, very pleasant hast thou been unto me: thy love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women b.*

Now, to apply these ideas to the heavenly state; how sweet, how ravishing must be the bliss which arises out of the union that subsists among the blessed spirits above, and which is attended with none of those circumstances that weaken, disturb

a John xvii. 21. b 2 Sam. i. 26.

and interrupt the dearest intimacies, the most cordial friendships on the earth! And how much more exalted still must be the bliss which is the inseparable concomitant of union with God! To have *fellowship with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ a*—to be *a partaker of the divine nature b*—to be so *joined to the Lord* as to be *one spirit c*; this surely is joy unspeakable, and full of glory. For the object to which the soul is united is infinitely perfect, and the soul itself is capable of the most perfect union with it, its powers and affections being enlarged and refined to their utmost extent. But I forbear attempting to explain a subject so far beyond our present comprehension, and which, if it can have any light thrown upon it, is best capable of being illustrated by that experience which has been the distinguished privilege of some few Christians, who at certain seasons have been so overwhelmed with divine contemplations, as to be in a manner absorbed and swallowed up in God. —I am, however, from hence led to speak,

3. Of that *Likeness* which results from this love of God, and union with him, and which is a farther eminent expression of the blessedness of the saints.

Friendship, indeed, supposes some prior similarity of temper and circumstances: for how 'can two walk together, except they be agreed *d*?' Yet there may be a real affection between persons who are in some respects unlike each other. As, however, their familiarity increases, and they enter farther into one another's sentiments and dispositions, their mutual resemblance will become more clear and striking. So, the likeness which children bear to their parents, and that in respect of their manners as well as their persons, usually strengthens and improves as they grow in years, and are more and more susceptible of impressions from instruction and example. And thus it is with Christians, in regard of the blessed God. Though their resemblance of him is in the beginning very general and imperfect, so that, like the features in a new-born infant, it is scarcely to be perceived; yet, afterwards, as they grow in years, and their intimacy with Heaven increases, it becomes more and more visible. There is in the countenances of some good men, I mean their temper and

a 1 John i. 3. *b* 2 Pet. i. 4.
c 1 Cor. vi. 17. *d* Amos iii. 3.

department, such a mixture of sweetness, beauty and dignity, as strikes almost every beholder, puts their relation to God beyond all dispute, and obliges even the enemies of religion to acknowledge that they have been with Jesus. *Beholding as in a glass, the glory of the Lord, they are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the spirit of the Lord a.*

But after all, how very imperfect a reflection of the divine excellencies does the brightest character on earth exhibit, in comparison with his who is the least in the kingdom of heaven above! While the glory of the one resembles only the pale light of the moon, that of the other is comparable with the sun shining in its meridian glory. Admitted, as those happy spirits are, not only to the immediate vision, but into the intimate embraces of the blessed God, O how is his radiant image enstamped on all the faculties of their minds, and on all the dispositions and affections of their hearts! Contemplating the transcendent glories of the omniscient and all wise God, how are their understandings enriched with inexhaustible treasures of wisdom and knowledge! Conversing with the most amiable of all objects, the Beauty of Holiness, how are their tempers moulded into an exact conformity to that perfect pattern of truth and rectitude, benevolence and love! And feeling, if I may so express myself, their souls united to the Chief Good, how are they *filled with all the fulness of God b!* They *know even as* they are *known c.* They are *pure as God is pure d.* They are *perfect as* their *Father who is in heaven is perfect e.* So fair, so deep, so abiding an impress of the divine likeness, must surely display beauties to the view of every beholder surpassing all imagination; while it diffuses through the conscious breast pleasures too refined and ecstatic to be described.

God has even in this life, on some extraordinary occasions, afforded sensible manifestations of his glory; as witness Sinai of old and Tabor afterwards: and the effect was truly great. But what was the lustre which distinguished the countenances of Moses or the apostles, overshadowed as they were with *the excellent glory,* when compared with that which is now reflected on them from the immediate presence of God above? And what

a 2 Cor. iii. 18. *b* Eph. iii. 19. *c* 1 Cor. xiii. 12.
d 1 John iii. 3. *e* Matt. v. 48.

that holy zeal and fervent love, with which these amazing intercourses with the great Father of spirits inspired their breasts, when compared with what they now feel and enjoy in heaven? It is truly beyond conception. 'As for me,' says David, exulting in the prospect of that world, 'I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness *a*.' And though 'it doth not yet appear what we shall be, yet we know,' says the beloved disciple of Jesus, 'that when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is *b*.'—And now from this ardent love of God, this intimate union with him, and this perfect conformity to his likeness, there results,

4. And lastly, *Satisfaction.*

So the psalmist expresses himself in the passage just quoted, 'I shall be *satisfied*, when I awake, with thy likeness.' And this is the substance, the quintessence, the perfection of happiness. In the present life, love is often attended with painful and restless desire. Pleasure produces satiety, and of consequence discontent. And excessive joy, by the unnatural ferment it raises in the spirits, deprives us of self-possession, and so in the issue makes us unhappy. Nor is it to be wondered that this is the case, since there is a manifest inequality between the passions of the human heart, and the means which men usually have recourse to for the gratification of them. Our desires are proportioned to objects of the largest dimensions, and of endless duration: but the things of the present life are little, vain and transitory. Wherefore, if we possessed all the world can give, we should not have enough, there would still remain some wish to be gratified. And with this account of the matter, our own continual feelings and experience well agree. For, whatever may be the flattering pretensions of wealth, honour and pleasure, by which, when beheld at a distance, they impose upon the fancy and captivate the heart; we no sooner enjoy them than they loudly tell us, that it is not in their power to make us happy. Nay, though we have the Chief Good for our supreme object, yet, such is the irregularity of our passions in the present imperfect and depraved state, that to find satisfaction, in the highest and noblest sense of it, is absolutely unattainable.

a Psal. xvii. 15. *b* 1 John iii. 2.

But it is otherwise in heaven. There the affections of the soul, which had treacherously forsaken their first love, and fruitlessly wandered after false delights among the creatures of sense, are brought back to God, united to him their centre, and made completely happy in the full enjoyment of his favour and presence. Completely happy I say, for there being a perfect agreement between the capacity and the object, that is, the desires of the heart being boundless, and God infinite, there must proceed from the contemplation and fruition of him, a satisfaction that is entire, substantial and perpetual. Love has there none of the languishments of restless desire. Pleasure none of the disgusts of satiety. And joy none of the tumult which attends ecstasy. There is no painful division of the heart between God and the creature, no tremblings of the passions through false attractions, no hankering of the mind after inferior bliss. No vacuity in the soul, nor yet oppression of its powers. No wish denied, no expectation disappointed. O happy spirits! they are ever contemplating the chief good, yet never wearied with their contemplations. They love, and they *rest in* their *love a.* They possess a *fulness of joy b,* yet are not satiated with their joys. Blessed satisfaction indeed! This is the highest felicity to which a creature can attain, the utmost perfection of human nature. GOD IS ALL IN ALL.—And now I have only to add,

FIFTHLY and lastly, That the happiness of the saints is eternal.

The short duration of all sublunary bliss, has ever been considered as a striking expression of the vanity of the world. Nor can we, amidst the pleasant enjoyments of life, give a glance only at this plain truth without feeling some kind of emotion. The best antidote, however, against the undue influence of such a reflection, is a cheerful hope of this happy state I have been describing. But, if the like idea were to start up in the minds of the blessed above, or if only a jealousy were to arise in their breasts, that at some distant, very distant period, they might possibly be dismissed from heaven, or cease to exist; how would the thought instantly cast a damp upon their pleasures, and con-

a Zeph. iii. 17. *b* Psal. xvi. 11.

found all their joys! And the effect would be the more considerable, as the pain would be proportioned to the value of what they possess, and their high relish for it. Indeed were such a circumstance possible, it would rather be kind in God to moderate their pleasures, and suffer them to sicken upon their enjoyments, that they might be the better reconciled to part with them.

But it is not so. As God hath, of his infinite bounty, prepared unutterable joys for his people in the world to come, so he has affixed no other term to the duration of those joys, than that of his own existence. He is himself ETERNAL, and so is that life he gives them through Jesus Christ his Son. Amazing goodness! And this fact, so exceedingly important, stands as firmly established as the reality of a future state of happiness itself. For it is scarce ever spoken of in Scripture, but some epithet is annexed to it, that should convey this idea. The persons, habitations, possessions, honours, and enjoyments of the saints, are all eternal.

Here, the term of our existence is short. The beauty and vigour of youth quickly decline, and the firmness and experience of riper years, quickly yield to the assaults of sickness, age and death. But in heaven the saints never die, nor are they subject to any change or declension, but retain their capacities and endowments, both of mind and body, perfect and entire for ever. Here, one generation passeth away, and another cometh; societies are dissolved, or else composed of new members. But no such revolutions happen in the general assembly above; the company once met never part. Our dwellings on earth are at best but tabernacles, set up for the convenience of the traveller on his way home. Nay, this globe itself, stately and beautiful as the edifice [illegible]ust shortly be dissolved, and, "like the baseless fabric of a vision, leave not a wreck behind." But the house which God has built for his family above, the palace wherein he resides, the world where he displays the perfection of his glory, *that is eternal in the heavens a.* Our inheritance here we hold on a very uncertain tenure: they are sometimes snatched from us by avarice and oppression; or, if they escape the hands of violence, death quickly comes, turns us out of

a 2 Cor. v, 1.

possession, and puts others in our room. But the heavenly *inheritance* is as *durable*, as it is fair and extensive *a*. The *treasures* laid up for the saints in that better world, *moth cannot corrupt, nor thieves break through and steal b* : it is *an enduring substance c*, and *a far more exceeding, and eternal weight of glory d*. The honours of the present life, however they may dazzle an ambitious eye, are precarious and fleeting. Princes who shine in pomp and power, are, in a few years, obliged to descend from their thrones, lay aside their robes, and resign their sceptres to their successors. But the *crown* which the Lord, the righteous Judge, puts upon the head of the conquering Christian, *fades not away e*, the *kingdom* he gives his little flock, *is never moved f*. In fine, while daily experience teaches, that sensual pleasures are as transitory as they are unsatisfying, yea, that the most refined enjoyments of the present life, have their continual allays and interruptions, we are assured, that the joys of heaven are not only unutterable but eternal. They who possess them, know that they are perpetual; nor does the most distant suspicion that they will be interdicted or diminished, ever glance upon their happy minds. The sun that lightens that world never goes down, nor is one ray of its glory ever eclipsed by an interposing cloud. The capacities of the saints suffer no decay, nor does their relish for the pure and substantial pleasures of paradise, in the least abate. So that when millions of years have rolled around, it may still be truly said of them, that they are but beginning their bliss. *The end*, the period of the Christian's existence here, is to him the commencement of *everlasting life*.

Thus have we taken a general and transient view of the heavenly blessedness; considered—after what m[illegible]r good men exist in that state—the perfection of their na[illegible]—their employment—the pleasures which result thence—and their eternal duration.

But, amidst all the light which Scripture has thrown upon this important and animating subject, how faint, inadequate and confused are our ideas of that world! Indeed the most exalted description that can possibly be given of it, falls infinitely short of

a 1 Pet. i. 4. *b* Matt. vi. 20. *c* Heb. x. 34.
d 2 Cor. iv. 17. *e* 1 Pet. v. 4. *f* Heb. xii. 28.

what it really is. So he hath assured us who was once caught up into paradise, and felt awhile the transporting joys of that blissful place *a*. *Eye hath not seen*, says he, *nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him b*. The eye may have seen a great deal, the ear may have heard of more than the eye hath seen, and fancy may represent to the mind scenes far more beautiful and glorious, than either the eye hath beheld or the ear reported. But the utmost efforts of imagination, assisted by all the light which Scripture and experience furnish, fail in the attempt to give us a true idea of the glories of heaven. Let us now then close the whole,

III. With some improvement of what has been said. And,

1. How great, how inexpressibly great, are our obligations to the grace of God!

This *eternal life* I have been describing, *is the gift of God through Jesus Christ our Lord*, as we learn from the verse following the text. Benefits conferred on the miserable and undeserving, and benefits conferred on them at a great expence, call aloud for gratitude. So we commonly reason upon acts of benevolence among men. But O! what is the debt of gratitude we, any of us, in the most extraordinary instance, owe to a fellow-creature, when put in the scale with that we owe to our Divine Benefactor? The gift he bestows is, as you have seen, immensely great. Its value cannot be computed, all human measures fail. If the sum total of worldly bliss and glory were to become the patrimony of one man, that man would be poor, abject and miserable, in comparison with him who holds the lowest rank in the kingdom of heaven. We are not indeed at present in possession of this large and fair inheritance, but we have unquestionable evidence of its reality. It lies beyond the line of time, but it is not far off. The earnest of it is sometimes afforded the Christian in his way to it, and the enjoyment of it is secured to him by the promise of a God who cannot lie. These are cheerful considerations, and may well dispose our hearts to thankfulness and praise.

But how is our wonder heightened, and our gratitude inflamed, when to the greatness of the gift, we add a reflection

a 2 Cor. xii. 2—4. *b* 1 Cor. ii. 9.

on the demerit of the receiver! Had we, like the angels, preserved our innocence, the good news of this farther accession to our happiness in another state, would doubtless have been joyfully received and ingenuously acknowledged. But what shall we say? how shall we express our astonishment? when we see human guilt, impotence and wretchedness, become objects of divine pity, friendship and love. Surely that grace must be admirable, which does not only relieve the miserable; but makes them perfectly and eternally happy!—which does not only bear with offenders, and punish them less than their deserts; but buries all their guilt in oblivion, and accepts them as innocent!—which does not only hold back rebels from the hands of provoked justice; but exalts them to heaven, and crowns them with unfading glory! Admirable grace indeed! which, of its own pure good-will, pours a profusion of bounty on some, whilst others suffer the just consequence of their sins.—But is this all? No.

There is another consideration, which yet farther magnifies the goodness of God, and gives it a lustre almost too bright and dazzling to be beheld by our weak eyes; and that is, the prodigious expence at which this free gift of divine love is dispensed to us. *God spared not his own Son, but delivered him up* to death for our sakes, that through him we might thus *freely* inherit *all things a.* Go, Christian, to mount Calvary, there see your Saviour extended on a cross, pouring out his vital blood as the price of your redemption; and then say, whether the eternal inheritance, received as the fruit of his death, is not the noblest expression of love which Omnipotence itself could give? Nor can I help observing here, that as, on the one hand, these measures which God hath taken to provide for our everlasting happiness, reflect the highest honour on his goodness; so, on the other, they serve to heighten and magnify our conceptions of the heavenly blessedness itself beyond any thing that hath been, or can possibly be, said concerning it. For how great must that bliss and glory be, which is obtained for us at so immense an expence? The Son of God becomes a man, and dies, that men may become the sons of God, and live for ever!—Be your hearts then, Christians, dissolved in gratitude and praise! and

a Rom. viii. 32.

begin here on earth the song, which you will ere long sing in concert with angels above, *Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing a.*

2. If we have such glorious prospects as these before us, how should our affections be moderated to the world, and all its concerns and enjoyments!

No sober man, methinks, even though we put religion out of the question, can help being afflicted and surprised, when he looks around him, and observes what a prodigious effect the little things of this life have upon the generality of mankind. On the generality, did I say? I may add, on every individual in a greater or less degree. Ah! how eagerly do we catch at shadows! and how miserably are we affrighted at what cannot hurt us! How do we spend the fire of our passions in the uncertain pursuit of that which disappoints, if not torments; while the feeblest efforts to acquire the greatest good, quickly try our strength and exhaust our spirits! Strange! Will not reason and reflection convince us of our folly? Will not observation and experience bring us to our senses? Shall two of the plainest truths that were ever reported in the ear of man, and which we dare not deny or even dispute, that the world cannot satisfy, and that, if it could, a few years will deprive us of it; shall these plain truths, I say, be disregarded and despised? Yes. So it is, so it will be, while we walk by sight not by faith; while we look to the things which are temporal, and turn away our eyes from those which are eternal. Faith, and faith only, will break the charm, rouse us from the delusion, and restore us to our reason. O the infinite utility and importance of a divine faith!

It is your happiness, Christian, to possess that faith. Take up the glass then, apply it to the great objects I have been describing, and tell us the effect.—You see the joys of heaven. They are real. They are near. They are yours.—And now, satisfied through grace of your interest in the favour of God, and struck with the prospect of these great enjoyments before you, what think you of the world? Is it that important thing the generality of mankind take it to be? Ah! no. It appears

a Rev. v. 12.

little, vain and trifling. You wonder it should have so long engrossed your heart. Your passion for it abates, your indifference to it increases. Its power is broken. It is now too feeble a thing to subdue your conscience, or even controul your joys. Your happiness no longer lies at the mercy of its deceitful and precarious promises. While you relish the comforts of life, and have a just sense of their value; you stretch not every nerve to possess a feather, nor hazard your most essential interests to acquire momentary bliss. And while you feel the disappointments and troubles of life, you fall not an ignominious sacrifice to their rage, but preserve a composure and steadiness of mind, truly heroic and exemplary. Happy temper this! an acquisition far more noble and important than that of the whole world! Well! such is the effect of a lively faith, and cheerful hope of eternal life. O let us then, who are *heirs of God, and joint heirs with Jesus Christ*, be persuaded *to give diligence to make our calling and election sure;* and more frequently to realize these great and glorious objects. So shall we be superior to the frowns and flatteries of this vain world. So shall we be quickened to the unwearied discharge of our several duties. And so shall we adorn our Christian profession with the amiable fruits of patience, contentment and cheerfulness, of purity, love and obedience. Once more,

3. And lastly, What infinite importance does the consideration of heaven reflect upon religion in general!

Eternal life, it is true, is the gift of God. But it is not to be enjoyed, unless we humbly and thankfully accept it in the way he has thought fit to bestow it, and are prepared for the final participation of it by the gracious influence of his Spirit. *He that believeth and is baptized, shall be saved a. Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God b.* They are the words of him, through whose hands, and at the expence of whose precious blood, the blessings of grace and glory are distributed to guilty men. And can you be content, Sirs, to forego the joys of heaven, for the momentary gratifications of sin and sense? Or if you can, is there nothing alarming in the tremendous consequences of your exclusion from that world, I mean your suffering the torments of hell? For, if we will be-

a Mark xvi. 16. *b* John iii. 3.

lieve the Scriptures, there is no medium between these two states. Awful consideration! Let me therefore entreat you, by the mercies of God, by the bowels of Christ, by the terrors of the law, by the grace of the gospel, by the debt you owe to your immortal souls, in short, by every thing that is dear to you both here and hereafter, seriously to consider these things. *Behold, now is the accepted time: behold, now is the day of salvation a. Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, if his wrath be kindled but a little b.* Cast down the weapons of your hostility at his feet, and be assured, that, as his heart is made of gentleness and love, he will in no wise reject the humble returning penitent.

Here I might, yet farther to conciliate your regards, with the blessing of God, to these interesting matters, lead you into a pleasing view of the nature of religion, lay before you the evidence of its truth, and delineate its various excellent properties, and important uses. I might tell you whence it comes, through what channel it is communicated to us, the means by which it is improved and preserved, the comfort it affords in the hour of death, and its happy consummation in heaven. Animating considerations these! But as I have dwelt at large upon them in the preceding discourses, it shall suffice here to call up the leading ideas of the several discourses to your view.

The kingdom of God is not in word, but in power c. Religion consists not in appearance and profession only, but in the cheerful and prevailing subjection of the heart to the dominion of God, exerted over the soul, through the mild and gentle administration of the Lord Jesus Christ.—Its reality is capable of the clearest proof, from the nature of the thing itself, the testimony of Scripture concerning it, and the consent of the generality of mankind in all ages: so that *their* madness and folly is inexcusable, who *deny the power of godliness d.*—And, however, as to external circumstances, it may assume different appearances, yet it is one and the same thing, in all who are so happy as to possess it; for, in regard of that humility, cheerfulness, purity and love, which the gospel teaches and inspires, good men *have all* of them, in their degree, *been made to drink*

a 2 Cor. vi. 8. *b* Psal. ii. 12.
c Dis. I. *d* Dis. II.

into one spirit a.—Nor is it a matter of trifling consequence. It *is the one thing needful b:* far more important than any other concern whatever; that without which a man stands exposed to every kind of danger here, and, to the just wrath of God hereafter.—Difficulties do indeed attend the experience and profession of it in the present life: for he who will be a man of religion must *deny himself, take up his cross and follow Christ c.* But these difficulties, of whatever kind or degree, should not unduly discourage, much less alarm and terrify us; for they may be surmounted. *My yoke*, says Christ, *is easy, my burden is light d.* He requires nothing of us but it is our duty and interest to comply with. We are under infinite obligations to his grace. He has promised to assist and support us amidst all our trials. Experience has confirmed the truth of his promises. And after all, hard as his service may seem under some particular circumstances, it is much easier than the yoke of sin. —But it is not the only commendation of religion, that it will do a man no real harm; for it will most certainly do him, even in this life, the greatest good. *The ways of wisdom are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace e.* It furnishes the best antidote against the principal causes of uneasiness and distress. It pours the richest comforts and joys into the heart. And there is solid peace and satisfaction in the practice of its several duties.—And, as the cheerful practice of the duties of religion, affords the most substantial, and indeed the only sufficient evidence of inward piety, so he who thus *hath his fruit unto holiness f*, who lives righteously, soberly and godly, in this present world, will not fail to become truly venerable, and extensively useful.

It is also a further proof of the excellence of religion, that it is *from above g*, the effect of a divine influence or energy exerted on the heart. So it should seem, from a review of the manner in which it usually rises into existence. A consideration, however, of the depraved state of human nature, the infinite difficulty attending the great work of renewing the heart, and the clear and express testimony of Scripture upon the mat-

a Dis. III. *b* Dis. IV. *c* Dis. V.
d Dis. VI. *e* Dis. VII. *f* Dis. VIII.
g Dis. IX.

ter; I say, a dispassionate consideration of these things, must surely put the question beyond dispute, with a truly serious mind.—In like manner, the respect which religion hath to the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the grand medium of it, reflects the greatest importance upon it. *We are created in him a.* It is the fruit of his mediation, communicated to us by his Spirit, produced, nourished, and improved by the faith of his gospel, and is itself the impress of his image on our hearts and lives. —Nor has the great Author of this, the noblest gift ever bestowed on the children of men, failed to provide means for our improvement in religion. As he hath exhorted us to *grow in grace b*, so to that end he has urged upon us, by the most pressing motives, the general duties of watchfulness, self-examination and consideration, and the more special duties of reading the Scriptures, attending the worship of God, Christian fellowship, and prayer.—And since these means will of themselves prove ineffectual, he hath encouraged us to look for that influence from above, which, *like the dew c* that falls from the heavens gradually, imperceptibly, seasonably, and sometimes in a very large degree descends on the Christian, and so refreshes his heart, confirms his faith, makes him fruitful, and renders him truly amiable.—Nay, such is his concern for the welfare of his people, that he converts their afflictions into blessings, and makes them at once the occasions of trying the genuineness of their religion, and displaying its utility. *Be still*, is his language, *and know that I am God d:* so exciting them to patience and constancy, by a consideration of the existence, perfections, providence and grace of God, as they are held up to our view in the gospel of Christ. And, thus rejoicing in tribulation, we are animated to perseverance in our profession. *Though* sometimes *faint, yet*, roused by a just apprehension of the tremendous consequences of yielding to the enemy, and inspired with resolution by a firm persuasion of the goodness of the cause, the effectual support promised us, and the glories of the approaching victory, *we pursue e.*—Nor will divine grace suffer the real Christian to fail of the happiness he hath in prospect; for *he who hath begun a good work in him,*

a Dis. X. *b* Dis. XI. *c* Dis. XII.
d Dis. XIII. *e* Dis. XIV.

will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ a. From the nature of religion itself, and the promises made to it, its successful issue may be certainly concluded.——Religion, thus traced through its various pleasures, duties, exercises and trials, appears amiable, useful and important. But, what additional glories does it exhibit in the countenance of the dying Christian, who, *walking through the valley of the shadow of death, fears no evil!* And why? *The Lord his Shepherd is with him, and his rod and staff* defend and *comfort him b.*—And though we take our leave of him at the borders of the other world, and are not permitted to enter with him, and see the glories with which he is there crowned; yet from what has now been said, we may, we must conclude, that *that*, of all other things, is most interesting and important, which hath for its *end*, for its final reward, *everlasting life c.*

And now, is there a man who, amidst these considerations, can find it in his heart to treat the great concerns of religion with indifference and contempt? If there is, all I can do is to mingle compassion for his madness and folly, with the resentment I feel at his profaneness and impiety; and most earnestly to deprecate the vengeance he is thus drawing down on his guilty head. *But I hope better things of you* to whom I speak, *and things which accompany salvation d.* You, my friends, have, I trust, tasted the pleasures of religion, or however are excited by what you have heard, to an eager pursuit after them. While, therefore, I affectionately commend the humble enquirer, to the farther influence of divine grace, permit me, now at the close of the whole, to congratulate you on the joyful prospect before you, of the final consummation of your hopes, in the realms of light and glory above.

a Dis. XV. *b* Dis. XVI.
c Dis. XVII. *d* Heb. vi. 9.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.